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J. S. Leonhardt, M. D.

No. 18

THE

PRO AND CON

OF

SUPERNATURAL RELIGION;

OR,

An Answer to the Question: "Have we a Supernaturally Revealed, Infallibly Inspired, and Miraculously Attested Religion in the World?"

IN FOUR PARTS.

PART I. A brief history of the four great Religions claiming a Supernatural origin — Paganism, Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism.

PART II. Review of the arguments in favor of Supernatural Religion.

PART III. Statement of the arguments against Supernatural Religion.

PART IV. Particular remarks on the Supernatural Origin of Christianity, and statement of the views of Rationalists on Inspiration, Revelation and Religion.

BY E. E. GUILD.

TOGETHER WITH A SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR.

There is no human religion outside of human naturo.

The different forms of religion contain the elements of one universal religion, and are but different phases of the religion of humanity.

Describe to me the God whom you worship, and I see in that description a reflex image of yourself.

NEW YORK:
D. M. BENNETT, 335 BROADWAY.
1876.

PREFACE.

Whenever an opinion or institution which has long been held to be sacred, is attacked, the prejudices of their adherents will of course be shocked. This proves nothing either for or against the opinion or institution. The same shock is experienced by the Egyptian when he hears the sacredness of leeks and onions, cats and other animals questioned. Also by the Hindoo, when the divinity of his idols is disputed. And by the Mohammedans, when the authority of the Koran is denied. For ages mankind have revered, venerated and held sacred three great idols—the Priesthood, the Bible and the Church. The first has been regarded as the authorized instructor of the people in knowledge, wisdom and virtue; the second as the ultimate standard of appeal to settle all differences of opinion; the last as a secure shelter from the wrath of an incensed Deity and the evil influence of a semi-omnipotent Devil, who disputes with the Almighty the supremacy of the Universe. These are monstrous errors, degrading and pernicious in their influence. One design of this work is to expose them.

Although the Priesthood of the present day profess to be the friends of education, they are so only in so far as they can control it. There is a certain kind of

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information which, to the extent of their ability, they keep from the knowledge of the people. This work is intended to impart to them that very knowledge. The writer does not believe that ignorance is the mother of true devotion, nor that it is a good soil for the growth of true religion. Nor does he believe with Eusebius that falsehood is good as a medicine for the mind, nor that in order to benefit the people it is necessary to deceive them. He does not endorse the sentiment of Gregory, surnamed "The Divine," who says, "a little jargon is all that is necessary to impose on the people," nor that of Synecius, a bishop of the Church, whose opinion was that "the people are desirous of being deceived." And although he said that "to himself he should always be a philosopher, but, in dealing with the mass of mankind, he should be a priest," we say it is the duty of every man who assumes the office of a public instructor, to be not only a philosopher to himself, but to the people also, and to make philosophers of them too if he can. We do not believe that there is anything true about religion that the people ought not to know, nor anything false that it is expedient for them to believe. If the people are perishing at all, it is for the lack of knowledge and for proper direction of the faculties and powers which the God of Nature has bestowed upon them.

The present inhabitants of the world number 1,288,000,000 souls; one-quarter of these are nominal Christians. If we allow that one in four of these are actual professors, the number will be 80,500,000. Can the idea be entertained for a moment that for a period of near 6,000 years God has been endeavoring, by the most stupendous miracles, to establish a religion in the world, on the belief of which hang suspended the

eternal interests of mankind, and that belief in it is confined to only a small remnant of our race? Is it not a much better, broader, more charitable view, one more honoring to God, and more satisfactory to believe, that all forms of religion contain some truth and some error, and that it is a perfectly lawful and legitimate business to separate the one from the other?

To this work these pages are dedicated as an assistant. May they be effectual in accomplishing this design. The position defended by the author is, that there is no true religion except what is perfectly natural to man; and that whatever else is so called, is a delusion and a snare. The great objection urged against this view is, that "without supernatural revelation, we could know nothing about God, or our relations to him, nor of our duty to him and our fellow-men." This comes with an ill grace from those who accept as infallible an authority which flatly contradicts them. The Bible teaches that "the heavens declare the glory of God, that the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." Paul quoted the testimony of a heathen poet to prove that mankind are the children of God, and he asserted that the Gentiles who had not the law, but were a law unto themselves, did by nature the things contained in the law, their consciences accusing or excusing one another. Jesus, addressing the multitude, says, "why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" implying an ability on their part to distinguish between right and wrong. But what can be expected of men who have been educated to think that investigation and the use of their reason are wrong, and put in jeopardy their eternal interest? What men need is to have the men-

tal crutches on which they have been leaning removed; to be taught to rely on themselves, and "stand up and show themselves men." No greater evil exists in human society than a superstition which makes mental and moral slaves of men, drowning reason in fanaticism, and making men fear to use legitimately the powers and faculties which the God of Nature has bestowed upon them.

This work is designed to impress the minds of men, not by addressing their love of the mysterious and wonderful, but by appeals to those powers of the mind with whose dictates the views herein presented are in perfect harmony. The religious world is in a state of transition, consequent on which there is great commotion and apparent confusion. The same state of things existed soon after the breaking out of the Protestant Reformation, in view of which some timid men like Melancthon and Erasmus, threatened to abandon the cause and go back to the Mother Church. We have the same class of timid souls now. They fear that free investigation will unsettle the very foundations of religious belief, and leave men without any religion at all. But men of strong faith know better. The number of brave, free-born minds is very greatly on the increase. They do not fail to lay the axe at the root of the tree, to strike at the very foundation of superstition, bigotry and intolerance. They realize that the present commotion cannot always continue; that the storm will ultimately settle into a calm; and that when the strife is over, on surveying the situation, it will be found a very great advance has been made in religious thought and ideas.

The Pro and Con of Supernatural Religion.

PART I.

A brief history of the four great Religions claiming a Supernatural Origin—Paganism, Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism.

Is Religion a special revelation from God to man? This is an important question. If the affirmative is true, it ought to be known and believed by all men. If the negative answer is the true one, the sooner the fact is made known to the world the better. In answer to the question, millions of voices will loudly exclaim *Yes!* On the other hand millions of men with equal confidence and emphasis will answer *No!* Both cannot be right. Both are ready to adduce arguments to justify their respective opinions. I propose at this time to array the arguments of the contending parties before you. I will give them an open field and fair play, and allow you to judge which comes off victor in the contest. Nearly all great battles are preceded by skirmishes—by the skirmish lines of the respective armies. And so, before I bring on the onset between the opposing arguments of the affirmative and negative, it will be necessary in order

that you may have a clear view of the battle to clear the field by stating a few preliminaries.

By *supernatural* we understand an event, occurrence, or phenomenon, produced by a special, direct and miraculous act of Divine power.

By *Nature,* we mean the Universe, with all its varied physical, intellectual, and moral phenomena.

The four principal religions in the world claiming a supernatural origin are, the Pagan, Jewish, Christian and Mohammedan. *Paganism* was the religion of all the nations of the earth previous to the establishment of Judaism, and is now the religion of more than one half of mankind. We can trace its history backward into the darkness of remote ages when no human records were made. It is the most ancient, the most wide spread and has endured the longest of any religion in the world. Dr. Justin observes, that, "It was the religion of the greatest, the wisest, and the politest nations, of the Chaldeans, Egyptians, and Phœnicians, the parents of civil government, and of arts and sciences." It held its power over the minds of men until a century of the time of Christ, at which period it began to wane. At the time of the appearance of Christ universal skepticism prevailed throughout all Greece, and Rome, among all their poets, philosophers, statesmen, and priests. The forms however were kept up, and the common people who were sunk in ignorance still continued to adhere to it. In this they were encouraged by their educated men and priests, among whom it was a maxim, that, there were many things true in religion which it was not convenient for the vulgar to know; and some things, which, though false, it was expedient for them to believe. Those who should have been the instructors

of the people were their deceivers. Hence, two kinds of philosophy and religion were taught by them; the Esoteric and Exoteric, the first to be taught to the educated, the other to the masses of the uneducated people.

Judaism has existed over three thousand years. It was the religion of one nation only, and that comparatively small and inhabiting only a small portion of the earth. It is a very prevalent opinion in our day that the Jews throughout their whole history have maintained a steady and uniform faith in their religion. This is a very great mistake. Unbelievers were by no means uncommon among them. They had their Paines and Voltaires as well as we. At a very early period after the establishment of their religion by Moses, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, "and two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown," rose up in rebellion against him, and disputed his right to exercise authority over them. It is impossible to account for this fact only on the supposition that these men had no faith in the Divine appointment and authority of Moses. Reason asserted itself in the minds of these dissenters; but its voice was silenced by the popular clamor, and Korah and his company were sacrificed to the fury of their more credulous and practical countrymen. Aaron, a brother of Moses, and the first priest of the new religion, and his wife Miriam, rebelled against Moses, claiming that he had no superiority over them as a teacher of the Lord.

The frequent murmurings and rebellions of the Jews against Moses, shows that their confidence in his divine authority was often shaken and sometimes

well nigh abandoned. Absalom, too, rebelled against his own father David, and sought to supplant him on the throne, and he had many adherents. Solomon apostatized from the religion of his fathers, and adopted that of the Pagans. After the death of Solomon, ten of the Hebrew tribe set up a kingdom of their own, renounced Judaism and embraced and practiced Paganism. This continued for a period of two hundred and fifty years. In the mean time, the kingdom of Judah vacillated between the two religions, sometimes practicing the one, then the other. During the reigns of Hezekiah, and Josiah, Judaism was revived and flourished for a short time, but soon sank again with the fall of the nation. It is now well nigh extinct; a great majority of the Jews of the present day no longer regard it as a supernatural religion. At that time, and long before the appearance of Christ, the Jews were divided into different sects, much skepticism prevailed, and some of it was tolerated. The Essenes discarded all forms and ceremonies, and utterly denied the authority of the letter of the Jewish sacred books. The Samaritans and Sadducees denied the inspiration of all the books of the Old Testament, except the Pentateuch; and the latter had no faith in a future state of existence. And yet, Sadducees, and Pharisees, alike sat in Moses' seat and filled the office of the great High Priest of the Jewish religion.

Christianity, has existed over eighteen and a half centur es. It is intimately connected with Judaism, but has been made to supersede it. Judaism, however, might be true even although Christianism should be proved false. But if Judaism is proved false it would shake Christianism to its very center. The

first converts to Christianity were from the "common people." To this class Christ chiefly confined his teaching, and with them he mainly associated. He exposed the rottenness and corruption of the Jewish Church, and the hypocrisy of its priesthood and other Church dignitaries and members. This was very pleasing to a class of people who were treated with scorn and contempt by the Church, and made him an acceptable teacher among them. The new religion was accepted in Greece, and Rome, for a similar reason. It exposed the frauds and impositions of the Pagan priests, and inculcated the exercise of a spirit of good will even to those who were in the lower ranks of life. The Pagan philosophers, seeing in it a system of pure Theism, which was then the prevalent belief among them, and, admiring its beautiful system of moral ethics did not discourage its reception, but rather encouraged it, and some of them embraced it. Some of these converts, however, denied its supernatural origin, and wrote against it. Porphyry, a Platonist, who lived in the very midst of Christians of the second century, and who accepted the moral teachings of Christianity, nevertheless wrote a book to disprove its miraculous origin. So also, did Celsus, and Julian, one of the Roman Emperors, who once professed it, afterwards renounced it. For this, these men were branded as apostates and Infidels. Under Constantine, Christianity became the religion of the Roman empire, established by law. It soon became corrupted, and in this corrupted form held sway over the public mind of Europe and other countries all through the Dark Ages. On the revival of learning, skepticism began to make its appearance again. It increased more and more in

proportion as the arts and sciences flourished, and as progress was made in education and civilization. As the science of the laws and phenomena of Nature were made known to men, they became sceptical in regard to the supernatural and miraculous, and that skepticism they applied to Christianity. At the present time a wide spread unbelief in all supernatural occurrences and events pervades the minds of all ranks, classes, and conditions of men. It has gained an entrance into the Church itself, and many of its clergymen and laymen join with men of literature, learning and science, in utterly repudiating the idea that there ever was, is now, or ever will be any interruption of, or interference with the steady, uniform, and uninterrupted operation of Nature and her laws; and also, in the belief that we must have a religious system based on scientific facts, and not on the mere dreams and visions of visionary men.

Mohammedanism, originated in the seventh century of the Christian era. It was designed not to supersede Christianity, nor Judaism, but to supplement both. According to Mahomet, Christ undertook to make men religious by preaching a doctrine of love, and failed. He was commissioned of God to propagate religion by fire and sword, to convert men by force of arms. Mohammedanism spread with astonishing rapidity. It was established in Arabia, Turkey, Persia, and among several nations in Africa and India. It was planted in the sacred land trodden by the feet of Christ and his Apostles, and supplanted Christianity on its own soil. Mahomet had as many, if not more followers than Christ, and a though his religion is six hundred years younger than Christiani-

ay, yet there are more real Mohammedans than there are real Christians.

All four of these religions claim a heavenly origin in a special and direct sense. They do not mutually exclude each other. Judaism, it is true, denies the claims of all the rest, Christianity admits the claims of Judaism, but denies the pretence of the other two; whereas Paganism admits the supernatural origin of them all, and claims only that it is the purest and best of them all.

In this country the popular opinion is that the religions of Paganism, and Mohammedanism, are spurious and false; but that the claims of Judaism, and Christianity, are based on an impregnable foundation of truth. On the other hand a large and respectable minority of our citizens deny the claims of each one of them. It is only with the assumption of Judaism, and Christianity, that we have now to do. Those who accept these religions as supernatural revelations from God, do so on the authority of the Hebrew, and Christian Bibles, which they claim constitute an infallible standard of religious truth. Everything here, then, depends on the truth or falsity of the assumption in regard to that book. The question is: Is the Bible a special, direct, supernatural, and infallible revelation? The skirmish is now over, and the battle of opposing arguments begins. Let us examine with carefulness and candor what the disputants have to offer.

PART II.

Reviews of the Arguments in favor of Supernatural Religion.

1. On the affirmative it is urged that "*a revelation from God is possible.*" This we do not dispute. What we deny is that the fact of a thing being possible with God proves that the thing has been or will be done. God has power to do many things that he does not do. If I were to say that God has power to make all his creatures happy, therefore, all are, or will be happy, many of the advocates of the Bible would see the fallacy of such reasoning. But the argument is just as good as this for the Bible.

2. "*A revelation from God is desirable.*" To this we reply. First, that the fact of a thing being desirable is no proof that the desire will be gratified. Men have a thousand desires that are not granted. There are no desires more universal among men than the desire to live and be happy; and yet men die and are not perfectly happy. The argument in favor of universal salvation, founded on the universal desire of happiness, is just as good as this for the Bible. Second, however desirable it may be to have a revelation from God, that fact does not prove that the revelation would be in book form, nor that the Bible is that book. We have a number of books claiming to be revelations, and the argument is just as good in favor of each one

of them as it is for the Bible. Besides, a book revelation would not be adapted to satisfy the desires of only a small portion of those who have lived in the past, inasmuch, as not more than one quarter of them could read it.

3. "*A revelation from God is necessary.*" Necessary for what? "To teach us the existence of God, of a future state of being, and the principles of morality and virtue," we are told. But all these were known and taught by men who never saw or heard of the Bible. If a revelation was necessary at all, it was just as necessary for one man as another, for one nation as another. But nearly all knowledge of the Bible was for thousands of years confined to a very small minority of the human race. The believers in several books claiming to be revelations, may plead in favor of each the *necessity* of it, with as much propriety and force as that plea is made for the Bible.

3. "*The truths contained in the Bible prove it to be a revelation.*" So think the believers in other books called revelations, and the argument is equally conclusive for each. But is every book a revelation that contains truth? Then the world is full of revelations. Common sense teaches us that a book that teaches truth is not necessarily a revelation, else Daboll's arithmetic is as perfect a revelation as God ever made.

5. "*The wonderful Prophecies contained in the Bible are conclusive in proof of its divine origin.*" Most of the biblical prophecies are general in their nature, based on the idea of retribution, and consisting of promises to the Jews, of prosperity if they were obedient, and warnings of calamity in case of disobedience. It is the easiest thing in the world to make pre-

dictions in this way, and to have them verified to the very letter. True prophecies, also, may be based on our knowledge of the history of the past, of the laws of nature, and the law of cause and effect. If I were to predict that one hundred years from this time there would be wars and rumors of wars, that mankind would marry and be given in marriage, that murders would be committed, that there would be storms, tempests and earthquakes, the prediction would undoubtedly be verified in due time. Many of the so-called prophecies are couched in vague, indefinite and obscure language. So much is this the case, that they are susceptible of a great variety of interpretations and applications, and have actually been applied in a hundred different ways. Nothing is more obscure in he Bible than its supposed prophecies. No argument based on them is therefore of any force. Besides, we have outside of the Bible many prophecies more definite, positive, unmistakable and better authenticated than any in it. It is generally supposed that the Old Testament contains a number of prophecies which relate to Jesus Christ. I hesitate not to say that there is not one that can be proved to have any relation to him whatever.

6. "*The extraordinary miracles recorded in the Bible p ove its divinity.*" Is every book that contains a record of miracles a divine book? If so, then the Koran, the sacred book of the Hindoos, Gulliver's Travels, the Arabian Nights Entertainment, and Jack the Giant-Killer must be divine. If these alleged miracles could be proved, the argument based on them would have force. But they have never been proved. The authenticity of the historical portions of the Bible has not been proved, and to undertake to prove the

miracles by the Bible, and then the Bible by the miracles, is only reasoning in a circle, a mode of reasoning which no honest, intelligent man will adopt.

7. "*The good influence of the Bible in the world shows that it came from God.*" That the influence of the Bible, both for good and evil, has been very great is true. Its good influence we attribute to the good that we admit it contains. Its bad effects we charge not so much to its errors as to the belief in its infallibility. Were it not for this belief, its errors would long since have been discarded and all its good retained, without being to a great extent neutralized by its errors and this pernicious belief. Besides, the fact that a book has exerted a powerful influence in the world, is very far from proving that it is a book of God. The influence of the Bible has scarcely been greater than that of the Koran, the Veda, or the Shaster, but none of these are God's book. The Bible alone is not a successful civilizer nor moralizer of men. We have been trying the experiment for years. We have sent our Bibles and missionaries into every barbarous and semi-barbarous nation. We have given them a surfeit of each. At last the discovery has been made that schools, and education and knowledge of science and the arts are as efficacious civilizers as the Bible. It is true the Bible and civilization in modern times have accompanied each other. But in ancient times civilization existed in places where the Bible was unknown, and, indeed, before it had an existence. It is also true that in countries the most civilized, there we find the greatest number of unbelievers in the infallibility of the Bible. Civilization is to a great extent a matter of climate, race, circumstances and condition. The inferior races of men, and the inhabitants of the

torrid and frigid zones never attain to the same degree of civilization as those who live in more temperate climates.

8. "*The character of the men who wrote the Bible proves it to be an inspired book. They were evidently honest men, and they claim to have been inspired. If we say they were not, we accuse honest men of attempting to deceive.*" We answer, 1. Only a few of the writers claim to have been inspired *as writers*. None of the writers of the New Testament make this claim except the author of the book of Revelations. Neither Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, James, nor Paul claimed any authority from God or Christ to write what they did. 2. It is quite possible for honest men to suppose themselves to be inspired when they are not. Past history furnishes numerous examples of this kind. To question their inspiration is not to question their honesty. 3. We know nothing about the character of the biblical writers, for we do not know who they were. This we shall show in the proper place.

9. "*The numerous persons who have laid down their lives and become martyrs in the cause of the Bible, is an evidence in its favor.*" If all the men in the world should lay down their lives to defend a falsehood, it would not make the falsehood true. Every form of religion has had its martyrs, and almost every sect in Christendom has had them too. If the argument from martyrdom proves anything, it proves that all forms of religion are true, and that every sect in the world is right. The argument proves too much, and is, therefore, good for nothing. Martyrdom proves only the honesty of the martyr, and honest men are often mistaken.

10. "*The fact that the Bible is accepted by so many learned, wise and good men is much in its favor.*" This argument, like the preceding, proves too much. Many as good men as any have accepted the Bibles of other religions. Some as good as the best have rejected the claims to a supernatural origin of them all. Of course they could not all be right, therefore their respective beliefs prove nothing in regard to the truth or falsity of their belief.

11. "*The steady and tenacious belief of the Jews in the Old Testament, and of Christians in both the Old and New Testaments, cannot be accounted for except on the supposition that the events recorded in them actually occurred.*" 1. Here again the argument proves too much. How came the Greeks and Romans and other Pagan nations to believe in the wonders and prodigies recorded in their mythology? or the Hindoos to believe in the Veda, and the Mohammedans in the Koran? It is just as easy to account for the belief of one as the other. 2. We have seen that there never was a uniform and universal belief among the Jews, in the divine origin of their sacred books. Throughout the whole period of their history unbelievers were found among them, and at times a majority of the nation were so. The same is true of the belief in the New Testament. At a very early period after the compilation of that book, its authority was questioned, has been questioned ever since, and is being questioned more and more.

12. "*The fact that a belief in the Bible enables its possessor to die in peace, and in the comforting assurance of a blissful immortality evinces its divine origin.*" 1. The argument proves too much again. How dies the moral man of every form of religion and of every sect?

Is it not with the same calmness and peace, and the same comforting hopes? Does this prove that they are all right in their belief? Certainly not, but only that they are *honest* in their belief. The manner of one's death is no test of the truth or falsity of his opinions, but only of the *sincerity* of the dying man, and the *strength of his convictions.* Some of the greatest skeptics have met death with as much courage, calmness and peace as was ever manifested by the strongest believers in the Bible. 2. Nor is it true that believers in the Bible always die in peace. Instances are not wanting of their dying in the agonies of utter despair. The manner of one's death depends very much on the temperament, disposition and organization of the individual, the nature of his disease, and whether he is naturally courageous and hopeful or timid and fearful.

13. "*The fact that so many unbelievers renounce their opinions, and become believers when they come to die, is proof that unbelief is wrong.*" If by this is meant that renunciation of unbelief is a common thing among unbelievers, we deny the alleged fact. That some nominal unbelievers may have been induced, through undue influences brought to bear upon them, when prostrated in body and mind, to renounce opinions which they professed, but never possessed, is undoubtedly true. But in all such cases it is more than probable that the individuals could not tell the difference between belief and unbelief. Besides, is a dying hour the proper time to investigate and decide on a question which requires years to properly investigate and make up an opinion upon? Seldom do intelligent men change opinions which are well defined and understood in their own mind, on a dying bed. The

ignorant and superstitious often seem to do so; but, even in their case, it is not true as relates to the subject before us, because, on that subject they have no opinions that are worthy of the name. Much sectarain capital has been sought to be made out of these death-bed renunciations and conversions, by sectarian propagandists and proselyters. It is well known that early impressions on the mind are apt to be the most lasting, and to be uppermost in the case of weak-minded persons, in the time of sickness and death. Only a comparative few among men can rise above the influence of early education. Priests, knowing this, take advantage of this weakness, go to the sick and dying, and, by appeals to their superstitious fears, representing to them that their eternal welfare depends on their embracing a particular creed, easily gain their assent to it. In this way Catholic converts to Protestantism are often converted back again, and Heathen proselytes to Christianity recovered back to Paganism. Could anything be more disreputable, more beneath the dignity of sensible men, or more deserving of the scorn of mankind?

14. "*The style and language of the Bible is so beautiful, its sentiments so sublime, its picture of the life and character of Christ so much transcends the efforts of human genius, and the loftiest flights of any man's ideality, as to prove that it must have had a divine origin.*" This is precisely what is said by Hindoos and Mohammedans about their Bibles. The Mohammedan can find in no book so much beauty and sublimity, both of style and sentiment, as in the Koran. He bases an argument on this for its divine inspiration, and with as much sincerity as it is urged in favor of the Bible. Now what are the facts? The style of the Koran is mis-

erably poor and mean, so is that of much of the Bible. The Koran contains some as correct and grand ideas about God and religion, as are found anywhere in the Bible. So does the Veda of the Hindoos. If the sublime passages in the Bible prove its divinity, what do its low, mean passages prove? There is more or less of imagination connected with the belief in Bibles, as is evinced by the fact that the believers in each one of them claim that the one which they possess is by far the superior of all the rest. The followers of the great founders of religious systems in the world are infected with the same imagination. Mankind are prone to hero worship. They invest their heroes with every quality and attribute that they have power to conceive of. Just as the young lover invests the lady of his love with the attributes of an angel, and supposes her to be something more than human. For hundreds of years the greatest genius of man has been employed in picturing to the mind an ideal Christ. This ideal has been impressed on the minds of men. They go to the New Testament expecting to find it there, and they find what they seek for. Henry Ward Beecher has written a "Life of Christ," but it is not his life as recorded in the New Testament: it is Beecher's ideal of his life. Aside from the miracles attributed to Christ in the New Testament, we can see nothing that involves the idea of the supernatural in his history.

15. "*The Bible is rejected only by bad men, and all opposition to it proceeds from hatred to God, to religion and to truth.*" This argument, if it is deserving of that name, is scarcely entitled to a reply. It impeaches the character of every man who denies the divine origin of the Bible, and is therefore a direct insult to them.

Were it not that it is contained in so many books, and put forward in so many thousands of pulpits, I should treat it with the silence and scorn that it deserves. The fact that such an argument should be used by those who employ it, may be made the basis of a scathing objection to the belief it is adduced to sustain, and will be in the proper place. Let it suffice for the present for me to say, that the alleged fact on which it rests we utterly deny. That there are some bad men who reject the popular belief concerning the Bible, we admit. So there are bad men who are staunch believers in the authority of the Bible. The most ignorant portion of community, the criminals of the country, the inmates of our jails and prisons are generally professed believers in supernaturalism and the Bible. Attempts have been made to blacken the character of some prominent men who have been found in the ranks of the unbelievers. The memory of Thomas Paine and Voltaire has been assailed with all sorts of misrepresentation, vituperation and abuse. And for what? Why, simply because they did not believe in the divine authority of priest or book, and had the courage to openly avow their opinions. We do not claim that these men were saints. But we do claim that, whatever their character can be proved to have been, we can point to worse ones in the ranks of those who held exactly opposite opinions. Voltaire saw in the degradation of the French people, the effect of the influence of a corrupt Church and Priesthood, which claimed divine authority for their existence, and appealed to the Bible to prove it. He sought to emancipate the people from this cruel mental bondage by striking at the cause which produced it. Thomas Paine was a lover of liberty. To this

noble cause he devoted up his labors and his talents. After having assisted materially in establishing liberty in America, he sought to effect a revolution in England. He found the whole power of the Church and Clergy arrayed against liberty. He saw that what gave the clergy their influence over the people was the belief of the people in the authority of the Bible. To remove this obstacle to human progress out of the way, he struck at what he believed to be the root of this tree of evil. His celebrated work, "The Age of Reason," was a perfect bomb-shell in the camp of the Clergy; it gave them serious alarm, they have never forgiven him; from that day till now, he has been one of the best abused men that ever appeared in the world. The strong common sense and keen wit of Paine, and the caustic, biting sarcasm and irony of Voltaire was seriously annoying to the defenders of the faith; and as they could not spike their guns, they sought to destroy their influence by ruining their reputation. But what had the character of these men to do with the truth or falsity of their opinions? Even bad men may tell the truth, and the best of men are liable to be mistaken.

16. "*The remarkable conversion of Paul cannot be accounted for only on the supposition that the supernaturalism of the Bible is true.*" Paul was a Jew. He was thoroughly educated in the faith of Judaism. He belonged to the strictest of the Jewish sects, and was a strong believer in the marvelous and supernatural. He possessed an ardent, excitable temperament, and was a Jewish zealot. He was violently opposed to the new Christian sect, and went forth armed with authority from the ecclesiastical power in Jerusalem to hunt the Christians to prison and to death. On be-

coming better acquainted with them, he found they were peacable, quiet, well disposed and harmless. He began to relent; all the conscientiousness and kindness of his noble nature was roused into action. He began to have serious doubts in regard to the propriety of the course he was pursuing, and as is often the case with men when under the influence of powerful excitement, they run to an extreme in one direction, when the rebound comes, they go to an extreme the other way; so Paul, from being a mad zealot of Judaism, became an enthusiastic Christian. He first endured the Christians, then pitied them, and then embraced their cause. On his way to Damascus, some natural phenomenon occurred—probably a flash of lightning and clap of thunder, which struck him to the ground, gave him a shock, and threw him into a trance. In this condition he had a vision, but his vision was made up of such material as dreams are made of. He thought he saw Christ, and heard him speak to him, just as we see our friends and converse with them in our dreams. Paul interpreted the phenomenon subjectively, and in accordance with his preconceived opinions in regard to supernaturalism. He believed it was a special interposition of Providence—a very innocent mistake, and one that has been made by thousands of men. The conversion of Paul, then, is no more remarkable than those which are occurring every day, of Catholics to Protestantism, and *vice versa*, and of men from one sect to another.

17. "*The great cloud of living witnesses by whose testimony the Bible is sustained, is proof of its claims.*" Who are those witnesses, and what are they? "The sixty thousand clergymen of this country, and the hundreds of thousands in all parts of the civilized

world, together with the multitude of laymen belonging to the numerous Christian sects," you may say. But the clergy, are they competent witnesses? Are they disinterested? Have they no interest at stake, no sectarian, no personal, selfish ends to serve? Every one of them is pledged by solemn covenant to maintain the validity of the Bible, and on doing so, his living depends. Not to do so, is to incur the penalty of ecclesiastical and social ostracism, and the censure and condemnation of the entire Christian world. Would we believe witnesses in a court of justice, who had such interests as these staked on the issue of the trial? And the laymen, what do they know about the origin and history of the Bible, and the validity of its claims? Not one in fifty can give an intelligible account of what he believes or why he believes it. Are the results of calm inquiry, of deliberate investigation, of disinterested criticism to be set aside on such testimony as this? I leave you to answer.

18. "*The remarkable preservation of the Bible, especially of the Old Testament, through all the vicissitudes of the history of the Jewish people, proves that a special providential care was exercised over it, and this implies the divine authorship of it.*" The Jewish Scriptures could be read only by a very few of the common people. They were in the hands of the priests, to whom the care of them was committed. On them they relied for their authority as priests of the Jewish religion. What more natural than that they should preserve them with the utmost care, and transmit them to their successors? But notwithstanding all that has been claimed in regard to the scrupulousness of the Jews in preserving their sacred books, and in preventing any corruption of them, it is a fact well known to all

Biblical students, that some of their books were lost, and that the inviolability of the text of those now in existence, has not been preserved. The manuscripts now remaining do not agree, they contain additions, omissions, alterations and mistakes.

19. "*The fact that there is so much in the Bible that corresponds with the religious experience of all religious persons, is proof of its divine origin.*" Human nature is the same in all men in all ages and countries. The religious experience of all men who are intensely religious, is essentially the same. It is no marvel, then, that there should be found in the religious books of the Jews expressions of feelings, sentiments and ideas corresponding to those which are experienced and expressed at the present day. It is just what we would naturally expect, and if it were not so, it would indeed be a wonder.

20. "*The believer in the Bible has the 'witness of the Spirit,' a special revelation from God, assuring him that the Bible is infallible in its teachings.*" Allowing this to be so, such proof can be evidence only to those who have it, and involves the absurdity of supposing that a revelation from God is not sufficient without another revelation to confirm it. To the unbeliever such an assertion is proof only of delusion or deception on the part of him who makes it. It is much easier to believe that he is deluded or means to deceive, than it is to believe that God has sanctioned a book as infallible which he knows, by incontrovertible proof, to contain mistakes, errors and untruths. Besides, some of the adherents of all the different Bibles and creeds under heaven claim to have the same evidence in favor of their respective books and creeds. Can it be believed that God reveals to the Mahommedan that

the Koran is infallible, to the Hindoo that the Veda is so, to the Parsee that the Shaster is, and to the Christian that the Bible is so too? Is it reasonable to believe that God makes a special revelation to the Calvinist to convince him that Calvinism is true, to the Arminian to convict him of the truth of Arminianism, and the Universalist to persuade him of the truth of Universalism? Is it not possible that the strong conviction of the believers in the Bible in the truth of religion is mistaken by them for a strong conviction of the infallibility of the book in which the principles of religion are taught? But religion is taught in many books, but this does not prove them to be divine books in the sense that the Bible is supposed to be a divine book.

21. "*The divine authority and infallibility of the Bible is attested by miracles.*" But how are we to know that the alleged miracles were wrought? "Because the Bible says so," we are told. Here is an attempt to prove the Bible true by miracles, and the miracles by the Bible. If a man were to assert that he had wrought a miracle, and when asked for the proof, should say it was true because he said it, would we accept that as proof? If not, then why should we do it in the other case? Is not this argument just as good for the Catholic as it is for the Protestant? The Catholic attempts to prove the infallibility of the Church by miracles and the miracles by the Church. Such reasoning is futile and childish, such as full-grown men ought to be ashamed of, and yet many theologians employ it seemingly without ever seeing its utter futility and inconclusiveness. The ancient miracles could not be a witness for the Old Testament, for, before the canon of that book was settled, miracles had

ceased in the Jewish Church. The Christian miracles could not attest the New Testament, for, long before the canon of that book was settled, miracles had ceased in the Christian Church.

PART III.

Statement of the Arguments against Supernatural Religion.

Let us now look at the arguments on the negative side of this question. But first we will state our position, showing what it is *not*, and also *what it is.*

Our position is not, that the Bible is a tissue of falsehoods, and, therefore, ought to be suppressed, It is not that it does not contain much valuable instruction. We regard it as we regard all other natural gifts of God, as useful, if properly used, as destructive if misused. There is no gift of God that is not liable to be perverted and abused. Even the religious faculties of man may be misdirected and perverted, as they often are. Our position is not against the Bible, *as a book*, but against the *belief in it* as an authoritative book, by which our religious opinions are to be tested and tried.

The believers in the divine origin of the Bible assert that it is a special revelation from God, the design of which is to impart to mankind a knowledge of true religion, and also of God's plan and method of saving men from sin, and securing their happiness in a future state of being. From all this we dissent.

1. *Our first argument on the negative is, that the idea of such a revelation is contrary to all analogy.* On all other subjects pertaining to the interest and happiness

of man, God has left them to the guidance and direction of their natural powers. He has given us no revelation to teach us the arts or the truths of science. No revelations on the subject of agriculture, medicine, diet, laws of life and health, anatomy, physiology, astronomy, etc. Why then should it be supposed necessary on the subject of religion?

2. *Such a revelation is not desirable, because it would not be beneficial.* The mind, like the body, requires exercise. On it both depend for health, activity and strength. If God had provided a great store-house of food and clothing all ready for our use whenever our wants required, and we had nothing to do but to go to the fountain and get our supplies, the effect would be to completely demoralize the human race. We should soon become lazy, idle and indolent. No improvement or progress would be made. In like manner, if God had provided a book, containing all the religious and moral truth necessary for us to know, and we had only to go there and find it, the same disastrous effects would be produced on the minds of men. All inquiry and investigation would be useless, we should sink into apathy, inactivity and ultimate imbecility.

3. *The Bible has not accomplished what its believers suppose it was designed to effect. It does not impart to the minds of those who accept it, uniform information.* Instead of uniting men in opinion, it has driven them farther apart. Instead of lessening the number of conflicting opinions, it has increased them. It has increased rather than diminished the number of warring sects. It has not made men more tolerant toward each other, but more intolerant; no more charitable, but less so. It has not diminished wars in the earth,

but very greatly added to the number. It has not made men less cruel, but more savage, sanguinary and inhuman.

4. *The effect that the belief in the authority of the Bible has, on those who believe it, shows that it is erroneous.* Many of them suppose that, as the Bible is a finality, God's last word to man, no more truth is needed, no further progress is to be made, no further discoveries are desirable. Hence they sink down into utter inactivity and stupidity of mind. This belief, too, engenders a spirit the very opposite of that of religion. It makes men bigoted, uncharitable, conceited, dogmatic, dictatorial and tyrannical. They assume that they are certainly right, and that all who do not agree with them are as certainly in the wrong. They cannot be mistaken, for, do they not believe just what God has spoken, and is not what he has spoken true? They seem to imbibe a spirit of enmity against all who do not agree with them in opinion. Nothing offends them so much as to have the correctness of their opinions questioned; and whoever does so, they are ready to pronounce an unregenerate sinner, a hater of God and religion. We do not say that it has this effect upon all; we cheerfully admit that even many are too good by nature, to be materally injured by it. But we do say that this has been, and is its general tendency in the world. And this fact we urge as an evidence that the belief is wrong.

5. *The fact that the Bible is very obscure in its teachings, is an evidence against it.* We known that it is often claimed that it is perfectly clear and plain in its inculcations, so much so as that "even a fool need not err therein." Every man thoroughly acquainted with it, knows better. Even the book itself admits that

there are some things in it "hard to understood." Bishop Watson, when asked what the doctrines of Christianity were, replied, "it is much easier to tell where they are, than what they are." This was a candid confession, remarkable as coming from a defender of the faith. If we ask the believers in the Bible, what is Christianity, we shall get a thousand different answers, and each one who answers will confidently appeal to the Bible to prove that he is right. These conflicting opinions, too, are held by men of equal learning, talents and piety. How obscure must be the teachings of a book from which such conflicting systems of theology can be deduced, as Calvinism, Arminianism and Universalism? The Bible has been invoked to prove an astonishing variety and number of opposite opinions, such as no other book has since the world began. Among them are the following; That God is a being of love, and that he is a God of vengeance; that man is by nature totally depraved, and that his nature is divine; that there is a personal Devil, and that there is not; that Christ was God, and that he was no more than man; that he was a superangelic being, and was not; that he existed before his appearance on earth, and that he did not; that Christ died to appease God's wrath toward his creatures, and that he died to commend his love to them; that Christ made an atonement for the sins of men, and that no sin can go unpunished; that only a few of mankind will be saved, and that all will be. These, to be sure, are mainly doctrinal points, but even on the subject of practical morality and religion, the believers in the Bible are no better agreed than other men. They appeal to the book to prove that slavery is right, and that it is wrong; that to use intoxicating

drinks is right, and that to do so is a crime; that polygamy and concubinage are no sins, and that they are exceedingly sinful; that it is the duty of Christians to observe one day in seven as peculiarly sacred, and that it is not; that all Christians ought to be baptized, and that none should be; that a part of religion consists in the observance of forms, ceremonies and ordinances, and that it is perfectly form-free, and enjoins the observance of no set forms whatever. Now to say that such a book constitutes an infallible guide for the children of men, is as preposterous os to assert hat the sun shines at midnight.

6. "*The Bible may be appealed to, and often is, to sanction the worst of vices and enormities. Hatred of enemies;* did not David boast that he hated his enemies with "perfect hatred"? Did he not denounce upon them the most grievous curses? Does not God hate those who hate him, and can it be wrong to imitate his example? *Plurality of wives;* was not polygamy tolerated among the Jews? *Keeping of mistresses;* did not holy men of old have their concubines? *Retaliation and revenge;* does not God avenge himself on his enemies? and was not the Levitical law founded on the principle of rendering evil for evil? *Slavery;* was it not sanctioned by Moses? *Slaughtering of prisoners taken in war, and even of women and children;* did not God command his people to do it, and did not the holy prophet Samuel, set an example of this kind, by hewing Agag in pieces "before the Lord?" *Cheating;* did not Jacob's father-in-law cheat him, and did not Jacob pay him off in his own coin? *Lying;* did not God command it on a certain day? *Deception;* was not Samuel directed by the Lord to practice it? *Treachery;* did not Rahab pretend to afford protection

to a man who was fleeing from his enemies, and then betray and rob him of his life? and is she not commended for her faith? Was not Jacob treacherous to his own brother, in taking advantage of his necessities, and robbing him of his birthright? and also to his own father, in procuring from him the blessing which he designed for Esau? *Intolerance;* does not the Bible everywhere demand belief of men as the first and indispensable requisite, apparently, without regard to proofs and evidences? and did not Paul pronounce curses on all who did not believe his Gospel? *Persecution;* were not the Jews commanded to destroy all the inhabitants of Canaan who would not adopt their religion?

It may be said that most of these practices are condemned in the New Testament. So they are, but the New Testament is a part of the Bible, and the fact named only shows the conflicting nature of the teachings of that book. Many of the men who practiced the vices above named, are even in the New Testament, held up to view as exceptionally pious, holy and worthy men; how can it be expected that believers in the divine authority of the Bible can escape the contagion of their example?

7. "*If it was necessary for God to make a revelation to his creatures in book form, it is but reasonable to believe that he would protect it in such a manner as that his design in giving it could not be defeated. But such is not the case with the Bible.*" A book containing a revelation, and designed to be transmitted to future generations throughout all time, should be accompanied with external and internal evidences so overwhelming as to command the assent of every one that examined its claims. If it was in manuscript writings, and re-

quired to be copied frequently; if it was written in one language, and translated into a number of others, the same being who communicated it at first, should superintend the copying and translation of it in such a way as to prevent all mistakes. We should know who the original writers were, when it was written, and in what place. We ought to know when it was translated, and by whom. In fine, we ought to have a well-authenticated account of its origin and history. The Bible lacks every one of these essential requisites. The history of no book in the world is involved in more obscenity than that. Except the writings of Paul, we do not know when the books of the Bible were written, the particular place where, the time when, nor the persons by whom. But there are some things we do know about it, and what we do know is very much against it as a revelation.

The Old Testament is a collection of books which the Jews during some periods of their history deemed sacred; at other times they did not so regard them. The New Testament is a collection of books which were written some time during the first and second centuries of the Christian era. They were selected from a great number of similar books in about the third century. Before their collection and after, they, and many others beside, were accepted as inspired. The Old and New Testaments were written in languages which have ceased to be spoken. The books of the Bible existed for many years in manuscripts only, and have been frequently copied. Our English translation was made, not from the original manuscripts, but from copies of them, not one of which, of the Old Testament, was older than the ninth century of the Christian era, and not one of the New

older than the sixth. The different copies of these manuscripts vary considerably from each other. There has been various translations of the Bible into the English language, no two of which are exactly alike. Dr. Bellamy made a translation, which made some important passages say exactly the reverse of what they are made to say in the common English version. It is universally admitted by the learned that the copyists did make mistakes in the copying, that the translators did make mistakes in translating, and many of them admit that the collectors of the books made mistakes in selecting. It is also admitted that the copies from which our Bible was translated contained passages which were not in the original text. Our version, then, contains interpolations, mistranslations and supplied words. The division of it into chapters and verses, the supplied words, the heading in the upper margin of the pages, and over the chapters, the copying, the collecting and translation, is all the work of fallible men, for whom no divine guidance is claimed. Is this the care God exercises over his revelation? If he thinks no more of it than this, why should we concern ourselves about it?

The belief in the Bible as a revelation, is calculated to perpetuate some of the most degrading superstitions. Most of its believers understand it to teach the existence of a Devil, with his millions of kindred and subordinate evil spirits, disputing with the Almighty the throne of the Universe, and exerting a malign influence over the hearts and minds of men. The tendency of this belief is to induce men to keep a sharp lookout for this imaginary fiend, to the entire neglect of the real Devil that every man carries about with him in his heart. The Bible, too, is understood to sanction the

belief in necromancy, fortune-telling, witchcraft, sorcery, magic, special providences, and that diseases both of mind and body are produced by evil spirits. What wonder is it, then, that so many are led astray by the lying wonders of Matthias, and Joe Smiths, of the present day? What hope can there be for the improvement of men who believe that the affairs of this life, the events which take place in the world, and the phenomena of nature, are all the results of a special providence, without regard to order or the natural sequence of cause and effect? Certainly none; for, according to this view there can be no such thing as science in any department of nature; in other words, the fact that a phenomena occurred to-day, is no proof that it ever occurred before, or ever will again. Hence, those who hold this view are full of the belief in the marvelous; are continually talking about special providences either in their favor, or against them; are constantly dodging some miraculous thunderbolt from heaven, or anticipating some supernatural interposition in their behalf. It is not a real world in which they live, but one wholly ideal and imaginary. Solid truth, the facts of science, a knowledge of nature and her laws, has for them no interest, and possesses for them no charms. Until this spell on the minds of otherwise intelligent men is broken, how can they be emancipated from the bonds of superstition?

9. *This belief in the authority of the Bible blinds and bewilders the minds of men.* The Bible contains a record of prodigies the most astounding; of marvels the most wonderful, of miracles the most marvelous, and statements the most incredible. Hence, it conflicts with common sense, shocks our credulity, and

does violence to our reason. The man who believes it is put in a mental condition to believe almost anything. All power to distinguish between things reasonable and unreasonable, credible and incredible, is overcome. He believes, not on evidence, but on authority alone; he does not dictate his own belief, but has it dictated to him. Like the young of birds, he opens his mouth and swallows whatever is given him without reference to its quality. They are in the situation of the clergyman, who, in defending the Bible, said, "the Bible says that a whale swallowed Jonah, and I believe it, and if it said that Jonah swallowed the whale I would believe that." Now, truth is the natural food of the mind, as bread is of the body; and truth must be as wisely adapted to the powers and faculties of the mind, as food is to the taste, and digestive powers of the body. Food that is distasteful and indigestible, is unwholesome, so that the mental and moral diet, that violates our reason, shocks our moral sense, and wounds the best affections of our nature, must be spurious. There are thousands of good men and women who profess to believe in things which they admit look to them unreasonable, and shocking to their feelings; but, nevertheless, they feel obligated to believe as they do, on the sole authority of the Bible. Such persons are the miserable victims of a mental and moral tyranny that demands the best efforts of the best men to overthrow.

10. "*The great argument usually employed to make converts to the belief in the Bible, not only betrays a want of confidence in it, on the part of those who use it, but it constitutes a ground of objection to it.*" The principal argument usually relied on to propagate this belief in the world is that which is by far the most successful,

and leaves us with but one alternative. It is this, "Believe, or be damned." Thousands of persons who are as ignorant of the history and origin of the Bible as the veriest heathen on earth, will go into the pulpit and proclaim to their hearers doctrines the most shocking to reason and common sense, and when asked for the evidence of their truth, will tell us that "God is the authority for their truth." When asked how we are to know that, the answer will be, "they are taught in the Bible—which is God's word—and we must accept them or be damned." Could arrogance and presumption go farther than this? Here it is assumed not only that the Bible is an infallible book, but that they correctly understand a book which thousands have attempted to explain, no two of whom ever agreed in its interpretation. Is this the way to treat rational beings? Can such persons know anything about the science of mind? Have they the least conception of the necessary connection between evidence and belief? Do they not proceed on the supposition that rational belief can be induced by bribes and threats? Or if they are not ignorant of the fact that a sufficient amount of evidence will irresistibly produce conviction on the mind, and that to undertake to gain the assent of men to the truth of any doctrine by bribes and threats, is only to try to make them hypocrites, and mental and moral cowards and slaves; then, we ask, are they not the greatest mountebanks that ever "played fantastic tricks before high heaven," and do they not insult the understanding of man? Do the teachers of scientific truth first give their lesson, and then offer rewards to those who believe their inculcations, and threaten punishment to those who do not? Are they alarmed when

the truthfulness of their teachings is questioned, and do they threaten with the judgments of God and the wrath of heaven all who doubt or disbelieve them? If not, why is it any more necessary to do so to enforce religious truth than any other kind of truth? If teachers in any other department of knowledge were to proceed in this way, they would very soon be destitute of pupils, and it is certainly a marvel how intelligent men can put themselves under the teaching of men who are constantly insulting them. If such teachers do not know any better, they are entitled to our pity; if they do know better, they are more entitled to our pity still, but the course they pursue is deserving only of the scorn and contempt of mankind. Persons who are conscious they have truth to offer, and believe they can present an abundance of evidence to sustain it, will not fool away their time by resorting to arts and tricks, nor promises, nor threats in order to commend it to their hearers. The fact, then, that religious teachers do resort to these means is proof that they have not entire confidence in the truth of their doctrines, and that having no hope of producing conviction on the minds of men by evidence, they rely on appeals to their superstitious fears. The fact, too, that there is such alarm in their ranks whenever the bulwark behind which they have entrenched themselves is assailed, is proof that they doubt the impregnability of their position. The man who is afraid of Truth, or fears that she cannot take care of herself, or that it is not for the interest of the people to know the whole truth, is a traitor to God, to truth, and to man.

As to the religious and moral truths taught in the New Testament, such as the existence of God, his

fatherhood, the brotherhood of the race, the immortality of man and the golden rule, they need no confirmation from miracles, from books nor from men. They are their own authority and their own proof. They have the "witness of the spirit," and "the spirit is given to every man to profit with all." All forms of religion contain the elements of one universal religion. The dogma it is that has set man at war with man. More religion and less dogma the great want of humanity.

Reader, both sides are before you, judge ye what is right.

PART IV.

Particular Remarks on the Supernatural Origin of Christianity, and Statement of the Views of Rationalists on Inspiration, Revelation, and Religion.

The Epistles usually attributed to Paul are his genuine writings, except that to the Hebrews. This latter was written by some learned Jew, who was a convert to Christianity. The authors of these epistles were to a great extent the real founders of Christianity, *i. e.*, in the form in which it exists in the creeds of the various Christian sects. The doctrines of these creeds are based more on these epistles (not always correctly interpreted, to be sure), than on the teachings of Christ recorded in the four Gospels. To these epistles we are indebted for the origin of the doctrines of the Fall, Original Sin, Total Depravity, Predestination, Election and Reprobation, Miraculous Change of Nature, Vicarious Atonement and Universal Salvation, by Christ.

The difficulty to account for the origin of Christianity, without supposing it to have been established by supernatural and miraculous means I fully appreciate. The problem was to me a puzzle and a mystery for years. It was only after long and diligent research and investigation, that I was able to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. I have been abundantly rewarded for my pains. It is now clear to me that it is no

more difficult to account for the origin of Christianity than for the origin of Brahminism in India, Confucianism in China, Parseeism in Persia, Mohammedanism in Turkey, or Mormonism in the United States.

We will state what are the main facts bearing on the question, and the conclusions to be deduced from these facts. Modern criticism has proved, so far as the nature of the case admits of proof,

1. That the five books of the Old Testament, commonly attributed to Moses, were not written by him, but were compiled hundreds of years after his death, partly from some fragments left by him and others, and partly from oral tradition.

2. The other books of the Old Testament are made up of partly genuine, and partly spurious writings.

3. The Gospels were not written by the Evangelists to whom they are ascribed—*i. e.*, in the form in which we now have them—but were compiled after the death of their reported authors, partly from records left by them, to which many additions were made derived from oral tradition.

4. Notwithstanding, the Bible contains many valuable and important truths, noble and sublime sentiments, excellent moral precepts and many beauties, we are not warranted to believe that they had any other than a perfectly natural origin.

5. The numerous mistakes, errors, contradictions, inconsistencies and absurdities contained in the Bible, justify us in believing that it is not an infallible standard of truth, not authoritative in its teachings, not the product of supernatural inspiration, and that nothing is to be believed simply because it is taught in that book.

6. The several books of the Old and New Testament

were compiled, collected and published in two separate volumes by fallible men, who acted without any direct divine sanction or authority.

7. Christianity is not a supernaturally revealed and inspired religion, miraculously authenticated, but is a natural product of the human mind ; the result of long ages of progress and development of religious thought and ideas.

Without doubt many of the marvelous stories recorded in the Bible had a historic basis, but they were not recorded at the time the events are said to have occurred, but long after, and at a time when the original facts had become greatly exaggerated. The compiler and writer believed them to be true, and they obtained ready evidence among a people who were very ignorant, very credulous, full of the belief in supernaturalism, and ready to endorse anything that tended to glorify their nation or their religion.

Nevertheless, there is in the books both of the Old and New Testaments quite an element of pious fraud and imposition. Almost all history is written in the interest of a nation, party or sect, Bible history not excepted. A comparison of the books of kings and chronicles, shows that the latter was written in the interest of the kingdom of Judah, and with a view to glorify David the great Theœsatic king. Hence, it omits all mention of some of the worst acts of David, and represents him to have been a peculiar and exceptional favorite of heaven. The book of kings is far more candid and impartial, and tells the whole truth about the personal character of David and the doings of his kingdom. Between these two books there are other conflicting statements which no ingenuity has succeeded in reconciling.

The gospels—however blind some may be to the fact—bear internal evidence of having been written in a partizan spirit and with a polemic aim. The first and third gospels especially, were written to prove that Christ was the true Jewish Messiah. To prove this, they relied mainly on establishing that he possessed miraculous powers. Hence, they exaggerated purely natural occurencies into miracles, and collected and recorded all the wild and extravagant legends that had descended to their day and with which the air was filled. In order to make it appear that Christ answered to the description of the Jewish Messiah contained in the Old Testament, who, it was supposed, must be a descendant of David, they related the silly, ridiculous and absurd legend relating to his miraculous birth ; a story which defeats its own object, inasmuch, as if it proves anything, it is, that he was in nowise a blood relation of that personage. Besides, the legend is self contradictory, and contains many genealogical mistakes and errors. In order to prove that he was a subject of prophecy, they quote and apply to him passages which have no more relation to him than to Josephus, or any other man conspicuous in Jewish history of that time.

The fourth gospel was written to prove not only that Christ was Messiah, but that he had a pre-existence and answered to the Logos of Plato. It is the production of an Alexandrine Christian, who sought to blend the philosophy of Plato with Christianity, and thereby commend it to the favor of the Pagan philosophers. This book, the writings of Paul, and the epistle to the Hebrews, constitute the first great departure from the simplicity of the teachings of Christ, which finally culminated in the establishment

of that particular form of Christianity known as Catholicism. Let it be remembered that at the time when these books were written it was an almost universally received maxim, that it was right to lie for the truth, and to deceive those who require to be deceived. Nothing was more common than to forge books and ascribe their authorship to distinguished persons in order to give them authority among the common people. We may state, also, that of all the miracles recorded in the Bible not one was ever submitted to a scientific test.

The early history of every nation is a mixture of truth and falsehood, fact and fiction, legend and tradition. Even our own early history is by no means entirely destitute of the mythologic element. How much more is this true of Jewish history and of the history of Christianity?

The whole superstructure of supernatural Christianity is made to rest by Paul on the fact of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Now, that this alleged fact is intrinsically improbable no one will deny. It ought, then to be sustained by the most unimpeachable testimony, the most indubitable evidence; but we have not the direct testimony of a single eye witness of the event. Not one of the New Testament writers says he was present and saw him rise. The four different accounts of the affair are conflicting. The only points in which they agree, are: first, that Christ's body was laid in the tomb of a man who was a friend to him; and second, that when the tomb was visited on Sunday morning the body was not there; both of which statements we can very readily believe, without supposing that the body was dead when placed there, or that a man who was

really dead had been restored to life. It is much easier to believe that the body was in a state of swoon, from which it was restored and afterwards released from the tomb; or, that if dead, the body was taken away by secret friends and kept out of sight. We have plenty of witnesses who say "*he was seen alive*" after his crucifixion; but not one who says, *I saw him*, except Paul, and he only in a vision. I need not say that such testimony is not within the rules of evidence, nor that it would not be admitted to prove anything in a court of justice, especially so astounding an occurrence as the resurrection of a dead man to life and his subsequent ascension into heaven.

There is much better evidence to prove that miracles equally astounding as any recorded in the Bible, were wrought in the second, third and fourth centuries of the Christian era. For, in the latter case, we have the testimony of hundreds of persons, and among them, no less than nine Bishops of the Church who affirm in the most solemn manner that they saw these miracles wrought. And even in our own day—if we can credit human testimony on this subject—the world is full of miracles. In our own country—the most enlightened in the world—within the past half century, we have seen a Matthias pursuading otherwise intelligent men to believe, not only that he was a prophet of the Lord, but that he was the very and eternal God himself. We have witnessed the rise of a sect of Religionists who have sent their apostles to every civilized nation on the globe; making converts in each, and basing their claims mainly on the possession of miraculous powers. We have seen another sect arise, claiming, not miraculous powers to be sure, but extraordinary gifts of healing, prophecy, inspiration,

direct revelation, etc., and they have made more converts in thirty years than Christianity did in three centuries. The power to work miracles has always been claimed by the Catholic Church, and the same claim is made by the Mormon Church. We have the testimony under oath of living men who certify that they were eye witnesses of the miracles said to have been wrought by Joe Smith, the founder of the Mormon Church. And that Church, too, claims to have a book containing a supernatural and miraculous revelation from God. If such things can be in this age of the world, what might not have been done eighteen hundred years ago?

But, we shall be told—as we have been thousands of times—that to the Bible we are indebted for onr civilization, refinement of manners, elevation of character, and for the progress of science and the arts. I greatly marvel that an argument for the supernatural origin of the Bible, should be based on this ground. The facts do not sustain it. Civilization existed before the Bible was known. The Hebrew Bible did not elevate the Jews in the scale of civilization above the Pagan nations around them did not make them any less cruel, treacherous nor inhnman; nor any more honest or faithful. It did not prevent them from carrying on a war of invasion against the inhabitants of Canaan, and on the plea that they were Idolators, and therefore, abhored of God, making an indiscriminate slaughter of all who would not submit to their authority and give up to them their possessions. It did not prevent a civil war among them, nor the establishment of two separate kingdoms, between which an almost incessant war was carried on for hundreds of years. It did not hinder them from siding with the priests in their antagonism

to the prophets, nor from persecuting these, the best men of their nation "from city to city." In spite of the Bible, they set up in both kingdoms that very idolatry which they came there ostensibly to destroy. It did not save them from being proved haughty, dictatorial, exclusive and domineering; nor did its influence stay the hand of vengeance against Jesus Christ, the greatest living teacher of his time.

In our time, to the Hebrew Bible, we have superadded the Christian Bible, the latter supposed to be an improvement on the other. Both are bound in the same volume and we have the influence of both. We shall speak of it as one. That its influence has been salutary in many respects we very cheerfully grant; but we claim that this is owing not to its being accepted as a supernatural revelation, but to the plain, practical, and common sense moral truths which it contains. It is these that give it its vitality and its hold on the veneration and love of mankind. It is these that have saved it from oblivion. Instead of its having been a great instrument in promoting science and civilization, the car of human progress has rolled on, and science and civilization have prospered in spite of its influence. Scarcely a scientific truth has been discovered, or a reform proposed that has not been opposed by the whole weight and power of the Church, which is the depository of the Bible. The Church opposed the doctrines of modern astronomers and geologists and philosophers, until the advanced opinions of the people compelled it to relax somewhat. In the incipient stages of the temperance and anti-slavely reforms, the Church arrayed itself against them. And how is it with Christian nations as compared with others not Christian? Are they any more

faithful to their treaties than the Turks? Any more peaceable than the Chinese, the Japanese, or the Hindoos? I hesitate not to say, that in all the records of knavery and cruelty we shall search in vain to find a parallel to the frauds, cruelties, inhumanities and enormities that have been perpetrated by men who professed to receive the Bible as a revelation from God, and to be guided by its precepts. Witness the treachery to his own kindred, the fratricidal and matricidal murders of Constantine, the first Christian emperor, whose private character was even worse than that of Caligula or Nero. Remember the persecutions of each other of the two great branches of the Church, viz: the Catholic and Protestant, carried on for years and involving the destruction of millions of human lives. Think of the horrors of the massacre on St. Bartholomew's day. Call to mind the history of the Inquisition, that terrible engine of destruction which existed during five centuries; during which every possible engine of torture that ingenuity could invent, was employed to inflict suffering and death on the bodies and minds of innocent persons. Recollect the thirty years religious wars in Germany, the numerous wars that have been carried on in Europe by the Christian kings and princes of that country; notice the treatment of the natives of this country by their Christian conquerors, the stupenduous frauds that were practised upon them, and the vices that were introduced among them; see the Christian government of England deriving a large revenue from India by taxing the inhabitants for the privilege of worshiping Jugernaut; see her send her missionaries of the gospel, and her men of war into the ports of China compelling the inhabitants to accept her

missionaries and buy her opium, under the penalty of having their cities bombarded and their lives destroyed by the murderous cannon. Look now to our country and reflect on our late war, carried on by fellow-Christians and fellow-countrymen. How terrible the conflict, how fierce the combatants, what woe, what sorrow, what desolation, what destruction of property and life; and yet the two contending parties were cheered on, and sometimes led by men who, not only believed in the Bible, but professed to be the ordained teachers of the gospel of the Prince of Peace, whose mission to our world they admitted to be a mission of peace and good will to men. Instances have been known of clergymen appealing to the Bible to sanction the greatest of outrages, even the seduction of youth and innocence.

When I reflect on the crimes against humanity, I am led to exclaim, are these the actions of men, or is the idea true that infernals have assumed the shape and appeared in the guise of men? Where, in all the history of the world, is there a parallel to these enormities? Do the Pagan nations persecute, destroy and war with each other on account of their religion? Do men of science, philosophers, and so called Infidels war upon each other on account of their differences of opinion? But if they do not, why not? Simply, because they do not believe that the interest of religion can be promoted by striking down the liberty of thought and speech, and the right of every human being to believe whatever approves itself to his judgment. They are the friends of free toleration, Freethought, free investigation, free discussion and the liberty of the human mind.

The believers in Bible supernaturalism claim—as

all supernaturalists claim—that they have a God-ordained priesthood, whose function it is, by precept and example, to lead men to the practice of every virtue. But what has been the history of priests in all countries and in all ages? Are they exempt from the vices against which they declaim? Are they any less selfish, mercenary lovers of the good things of this world and of the indulgence of their passions than the average of other men? I shrink from the task of detailing the horrors of their record. I hesitate not to say that no class of educated professional men but what can show a cleaner record. The labors, investigations, discoveries and disclosures of lawyers, physicians and scientists have been of incalculable benefit to the world. But the priests, what have they done? They have filled the world with piles on piles of books, pamphlets and tracts, filled with the silliest nonsense and trash. Priestcraft and kingcraft are twin brothers, they act in harmony and concert together; they have filled the world with carnage and blood ever since the organization of human society; they have robbed men by confisication of more property than all other robbers; filched more money out of mens' pockets by frauds in dealing in the relics and rotten bones of saints and martyrs than all other thieves; caused more human suffering and tears, made more widows and orphans than all other human causes combined; they have inflicted more tortures than all other savages, and destroyed more lives than all other murderers. The Jewish priesthood began with Aaron, who manufactured an idol in the shape of a golden calf for the people to worship, and then told a deliberate falsehood in order to hide his iniquity. It ended in the crucifixion of Christ. The example of Aaron

has been imitated by multitudes of his successors; the priests were denounced and their time-serving policy exposed by the prophets, and in their official capacity they were scorned and condemned by the teacher, Christ. Everywhere they have proved themselves to be tyrants over the human mind, intolerant, opposed to human progress, unless in the direction marked out by them, and dealing out damnation to every one who dares to dissent from their opinions, or question their authority. In fine, they have in some instances "exalted themselves above all that can be called God or is worshiped," and in other cases assumed to be the vicegerents of God on earth, the only medium through which God's blessings could flow to mankind.

It is in no carping spirit that these statements are made, nor with any desire to slander, abuse or wound a single human being. These are not the sayings of a mad man. Sincerely do I wish that I could say in all honesty and truth, that they are false; but they are truths, every one, and being so, are necessary to my argument. I now appeal to the reader, and ask him to lay his hand upon his heart and answer nie. Have we not a right to expect from a people claiming a God-given revelation, constituting an infallible guide, a God-ordained Church, and a God-appointed ministry better things than these? Do not the facts, then, prove that the arrogant claims and pretensions of these men ought to be discarded by every rational man?

I may be asked if I thus impeach all of the clergy? By no means; God forbid that I should make so false and foolish a charge. No, the question has two sides, and I have been speaking on one side only and in general terms. I am by no means insensible to the

fact that there are among the believers in supernaturalism, both of the clergy and laity, some as good men as ever existed; some of them I number on my list of choicest friends, around whom are entwined my heart's best affections. To the credit and honor of human nature I am glad and proud to say that the priesthood and the Church have produced many as noble specimens of humanity as ever dignified and adorned our race; men as wise, as great, and good as any other; But what I claim is that they are not good because they believe as they do, but they are made so by reason of their natural character, dispositions and superior cultivation and development. They are good Christians. They would have been good Musselmen, or Hindoos, or Deists, or Free Religionists. We have good men outside of the Church as well as in it; good men of all forms of religion; good men of all sects and of no sect. Men we have, good as any, who have no faith whatever in any form of supernaturalism. They are good, not because they are unbelievers, but for the reason mentioned before.

Nor am I blind to the beauties of the Bible; but if it contains beauties, it also contains deformities. If it fills the minds of some with the most comforting hopes, it fills the minds of others with the most tormenting and distressing fears. If to some it imparts joy and peace, to others it imparts sorrow and gloom; if it makes some happy, it makes others miserable. The eloquent Saurin, a French divine, admitted that it had the effect on him to make "food insipid, society irksome, and life itself a cruel bitter." The influence of the book, then, in the one direction neutralizes its influence in the other. We can conserve all its good influence and prevent the bad by

abandoning our belief in its authority and infallibility.

If we reject the Bible in this sense, do we reject the idea of the existence of any such thing as revelation and inspiration? Far from it. But we claim, that "it is not necessary for God to speak in an audible voice in order to reveal himself and make his will known." And we affirm that ever since men took it into their heads to make him speak, each one makes him speak in his own way and say what he thinks he ought to say. Our book of Revelation includes the Bible and all other books. It is the volume of nature. God reveals himself in the laws and phenomena of nature, and in the powers and faculties of the human soul. He speaks to us in the sun and moon; in every star that shines in the blue vault above; in the globe which we inhabit; in the great ocean of waters; in every lake and pond; in every river, rivulet and spring; in the mountains, hills and plains; in every spire of grass; in every plant and shrub and tree that grows; in every flower that blooms; in every shower of rain; in storms and tempests; in volcanoes and earthquakes; in the lightning and thunder; in every movement of the mind; in every feeling and emotion of the heart; in every sensation we experience; in every object that meets the eye, and in every sound that greets the ear.

As to inspiration, we believe as the Bible teaches, that "there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." We cannot believe that for a period of four thousand years, God confined his gifts of revelation and inspiration to a comparatively small nation of people inhabiting an insignificant portion of the earth, to the entire neglect of all the rest of mankind. We regard such an idea

as too monstrous a reflection on his character—an impeachment of his partiality and goodness. God's sunshine and rain descends upon all; why should not his blessings of revelation and inspiration? Yes, we believe in inspiration, but it is universal. All are inspired, but not all in the same degree; some more, some less, each one according to his deserving and capacity; none to a degree that makes them infallible. Those who are the most inspired are the natural teachers of those below them. God has given them their credentials, noble intellects, hearts that beat high in humanity's cause, and an irrepressible spirit which makes each one feel, woe is me if I proclaim not God's truth. "The world is their parish, and mankind universally are their parishioners." They feel that they have a mission on earth, and until that is accomplished no harm can befall them. God's inspiration and revelation cannot be confined within the lids of any book, nor the limits of any one man's mind, nor to a single nation only; not to only one quarter of the globe. The true light, as saith the scriptures, "enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world." That the Jewish prophets were inspired we do not doubt; so were Confucius, Buddha and Mahomet, so was Christ and his Apostles, and Christ more than all who had gone before him. Paul was inspired more than all the rest of the apostles put together. He dared to put the spirit above the letter of inspiration, and to teach that in all cases where there was a conflict between them the letter must yield. No doubt the Bible contains revelations from God; but the book itself is the work of human hands and bears distinct marks of its human origin. No doubt God spake to Moses; but in the same way that

he has always been speaking to the human race. In the infancy of the race his voice is only faintly heard because the peoples' hearing is indistinct; but as the race progresses and intellect and moral sense is more developed, his voice is more distinctly heard and better comprehended. Inspiration, then, is progressive; the final word has not yet been spoken. Revelation is more full and complete to-day than ever before; but we may expect even greater revelations in the future. The difference between us and other religionists is not that we believe less, but a great deal more.

Our God is the power that controls the universe of matter; mind and morals; the all-powerful, wise and good. Our Church is the whole world; the members of it the entire race of man. If some are bad members it is the duty of the rest to make them better. Our Temple is all space. Our altar is "earth, sea and skies." Our sacrifices and hymns of praise are joyful and thankful hearts. Our prayers are good desires and wishes, accompanied by corresponding acts and deeds. We endeavor to manifest our regard and reverence for the Supreme Being, by discharging with fidelity the duties of life and doing good to our fellow-men. Upon our altars no victims die; no blood is shed; no offering is presented of burning flesh or sweet scented herbs. "We never presume to offer aid to almighty power; to counsel infinite wisdom; to communicate intelligence to omnicience, nor to desire to avert the judgments of immaculate purity and justice; nor to try to make infinite love more kind to his creatures." We tolerate all opinions, and persecute for none. We seek to combat ignorance and superstition, not by force and violence, but by imparting

knowledge and instruction. We endeavor to lead the erring from vice and to the practice of virtue, not by threats and denunciations, but by mild reproof and gentle pursuasion. We worship God, not so much by set forms and ceremonies and prescribed rules, as by doing good to each other. We use no signs, symbols, amulets or charms. We fear no devils worse than men carry in their own bosoms. We make no pilgrimages to Mecca, to the Ganges, nor to Jerusalem. We are not solitaries, recluses, monks, nuns, anchorites, misanthropes nor pillar saints. We do not believe that the owl is a better bird for his gravity, nor the lark a worse one for his merry notes; nor that a man's religion can be measured by the length of his face. We believe in cultivating cheerfulness, mirth and laughter; in manifesting a spirit of kindness to all men without exception, the bad as well as good, and to everything that lives and breathes. We believe in making men good by making them happy. We believe that the most acceptable return we can make for all our blessings is to be thankful for them and enjoy them, and that in so doing we only obey God. We do not fast nor torture our bodies for the good of our souls. We do not spend our days in gloom and sorrow, and fancy that by so doing we are serving either God or man. We fear no truth, and accept without hesitation from whatever source, whatever appears to be true, and as unhesitatingly reject what we deem to be false. We endeavor to cultivate a sufficient amount of manhood, moral courage and heroism, to fearlessly avow our honest opinions.

If we reject the idea of the supernatural origin of the Bible and of its absolute authority and infallibility, do we reject the beautiful moral and religious pre-

cepts, the sublime and elevating sentiments contained in the Old and New Testaments? Surely not; or in accepting these, must we endorse the gross, vulgar ideas, the incredible statements, the unreasonable, absurd doctrines therein contained? If we read in a book that two and two are four, and in the same book that two and two are ten, if we believe the last, must we, in order to be consistent deny also the first? But this is precisely what is meant when we are told that if we reject one part of the Bible we must disbelieve the whole. Again, if we reject the supernaturalism of Christianity, do we therefore renounce all religion? As well might we renounce our nature, or our manhood. The Bible did not make religion, nor is it dependent on it. Religion existed before there was any Bible. It had its birth in the heart of the first man that ever lived. Moses, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Socrates, Plato and Seneca were religious men; but they never saw the Bible. The same causes that made them religious can make us also. Religion has its foundation in the nature and constitution of men. Human religion has no existence outside of human nature. It cannot be infused into man nor engrafted on him; it has its seat, its root, its germ in the heart. All true religion must be of the heart and be developed within. If all the Bibles in the world of every name were exterminated, religion, however much it might suffer from the loss of what is good and true contained in them, would still survive the shock and re-appear in all its inherent power and splendor.

Tell me not, then, that Rationalists are Infidels to religion, when I know that their belief is that religion stands in no need of falsehoods, deception, pious frauds, supernatural agencies nor miracles to support

it, and that in no way can it be destroyed except by exterminating the human race. *Religion is goodness*, and just as much goodness as there is in the world, in so much is the world blessed by religion. In proportion as goodness is developed in the individual man and carried out by him in practice, in that proportion he is religious. Religion existed before writing was known or books made, or ever ceremonials instituted, creeds drawn up, or a priesthood established. It will remain even if all these should be swept away.

But "how about theological doctrines?" it may be asked. Ah! we have now introduced the great bone of contention which for ages has agitated the religious world, producing confusion, strife and contention, and almost, if not quite, neutralizing the beneficial influence of religion among men. In regard to theological dogmas, each man must be his own judge. In so far as men form their own opinions, each man's opinion will be a bantling of his own—a child of his own creation. He will manifest toward it parental affection, he will defend it when attacked, and assert, as many do about their children, that it is the bigest, handsomest, brightest and best that the human mind ever gave birth to. It has been well said that "it is with our opinions as with our watches, those of others go too fast or too slow, ours only, keeps the true hour of the day." It is only men of refinement and culture that can rise superior to this narrow and selfish prejudice. Men's judgments differ, and, therefore, there will be differences of opinions among them. We have nothing to do with the opinions of others except to tolerate them, and correct them if we can, if we deem them to be erroneous, by argument

and persuasion. Until we practice on this principle, there can be no peace. The good man practices religion irrespective of creed, sect or party, and hence it is, that we have good men of every faith. If any creed beneath the heavens could be supposed to have power to drive out the last vestige of goodness from the human heart, it is that of St. Augustine and John Calvin. It asserts, in the most plain and unqualified terms, the utter vileness of human nature, and that the manner of life and ultimate destiny of each individual of the human race is fixed and determined by the absolute, unalterable, unchangeable and irreversable decree of the Almighty, without regard to the goodness or badness of the persons. And yet, among the believers in this creed have been found many as good men as ever lived on earth. Men, then, are sometimes good in *spite* of their creeds. But however at variance men may be in respect to their creeds, goodness is recognized everywhere. God has set his seal upon it, and it passes current all over the world, in all ranks, classes and conditions of men, without one solitary exception. Even the vilest of the vile respect, honor and applaud the good man.

But I am often asked, "how without supernatural revelation are we to know anything about God and immortality?" Long before the Bible existed men believed in God. No man can believe in God unless he feels God within. This, in a different form of words, was one of the maxims of the great teacher Christ, and is a profound truth. The pure in heart see God. None others can see him. Bad men may believe in *a* God, but it is not the true God. Like the devils spoken of in the Bible, they "believe and tremble." Their God is only a reflex image of them-

selves. The man who believes in God may not be able to define him even to his own satisfaction. He may not be able to comprehend his mode of existence, or to conceive him as having form, shape, size or locality. But whoever belleves in the existence of omnipotent power, directed by infinite wisdom and goodness, and that this power has established the government of the Universe on the basis of exact and equal justice to all his dependent creatures, thereby securing absolute recompense to all exactly according to their deserts; and, furthermore, that although he shows no special favor to any, he takes infinite pains to secure the interest of the race, and that whatever benefits he confers on the race will be ultimately participated in by every individual of the race; whoever, I say, believes this, believes in God.

The doctrine of immorality was not first announced in the Bible, nor is it proved by it. Some of the Scripture writers express strong doubts on the subject. Only one attempted to prove it, viz: Paul, and he rests it on a very precarious foundation—the alleged fact vouched for by himself, on hearsay testimony, of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This alleged fact is quite as difficult to prove as the doctrine which is made to depend on it. The only other argument for it in the Bible is that attributed to Christ in his reported conversation with the Sadducers. When we examine it, we find it to be a mere play upon words, a verbal quibble, which attributes to the Old Testament writers thoughts which they did not intend to express, a proceeding quite unworthy of Christ, if, indeed, he was guilty of it, which is more than can be known.

The doctrines of God and immortality are true if

true at all irrespective of the Bible. They are true not because they are taught there, but they are taught there because they are true. These doctrines are to be believed, if believed at all, not because they can be proved by logical argument, but because they meet with a response from the inmost depths of the human soul. No man of independent thought can believe in immortality who does not feel himself to be immortal. And he will feel himself to be so in proportion as he becomes "pure in heart." At all events, he will be resigned to his lot, and accept as the *best good* whatever destiny the God of purity, justice and goodness may please to assign him.

The truly good man, who is enlightened, as well as good, will practice goodness because he loves it, and for its own sake. He is not moved to action by considerations of reward in another state of being, nor deterred from vice by fear of punishment. He claims no merit, however meritorious; no reward, however deserving. He has faith in God, in human nature, in truth and goodness, and truth and goodness are to him all in all. He does not fear to have his principles examined, investigated and scrutinized. He does not deprecate fair manly discussion and controversy, for he knows that God is on the side of truth, and that the more it is examined the brighter it will appear. He puts his trust in God, and has no fear of what devils or men can do unto him. Goodness is his comfort in life; his consolation and support in that great event in the history of us all which we call death. GREAT IS GOODNESS. May it ultimately pervade the heart and mind of every human being. "Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord," and may all the people say, AMEN.

"'Twas thus the Royal mandate ran,
When first the human race began;
The social, friendly, honest man,
'Tis he;
Fulfils great nature's law,
And none but he."

PART V.

Review of the evidence in favor of Miracles, and of the authenticity of the New Testament.

The substance of the best things that can be said in favor of miracles, and of the authenticity of the New Testament may be summed up in the following propositions:

1. There is an antecedent probability in favor of miracles as a means of authenticating revelation. 2. The doctrines of the Bible are of such a nature as to prove the book divine. 3. It is impossible to account for the existence of so many marvelous stories in the New Testament, only by supposing either that they are true, or that the Evangelists were guilty of wilfully falsifying in order to deceive. 4. Variations in the accounts of the Bible writers is no proof that what they record is false, inasmuch as "substantial agreement with circumstantial variety is characteristic of all human testimony."

1. *The antecedent probability.* Miracles, it is said, are necessary in order to authenticate revelation. This we deny, and therefore deny the probability of them. If God wished his creatures to be religious, the probability is, he would make them naturally so, and not so arrange the order of nature as to make it necessary to break in upon and disturb the natural

order in revealing himself and making his will known. Accordingly, we find that man is endowed by nature with religious powers and faculties—that the germ of religion is planted in his heart and mind. That in the infancy of the human race and while in a barbarous condition, the religious sentiments should be comparatively latent or but feebly manifested, and often misdirected is no more strange than that the reasoning powers of man should be in the same condition, or that we should be born into existence with all our powers both of body and mind in a latent condition.

It is generally admitted that miracles are intrinsically improbable and incredible. If, then, it was necessary for God to make a special revelation to man and to authenticate it by miracles, the amount of proof of the miracles ought to correspond to their incredibility. If we ask for proof of the miracles, we are told that the Bible is authority for them. But how can an incredible thing be authenticated by an authority which itself needs authentication?

2. *The doctrines of the Bible.* If they were all new and true that would not prove that they were specially revealed; nor that they were above the conception of the human mind. Besides, there is no religious doctrine or moral precept, no rite, ceremony or institution taught in the Old Testament, that had not its counterpart in the opinions and religions of the Pagan nations existing when the Hebrew Bible was written. And all the real doctrines and precepts taught by Christ, as well as all that have been incorporated with them, have their counterpart in the teachings of men who preceded him by several centuries.

3. *Were Christ and his disciples impostors?* In re-

gard to Christ, it is sufficient to say, that as he left no record of his life or teachings, and did not authorize any one to make such a record for him; and as there is abundant evidence in the record which we have that it attributes to him sayings that he did not say, and doings which he never did, it is impossible to tell what he did or did not say and do. As for the Evangelists, it has never been proved that they were the authors of the books usually ascribed to them. The weight of evidence, and even of authority of learned divines, is that they were not. But suppose they were. Then we shall be asked "if the miracles recorded in the four gospels were not wrought, how came the writers to *believe* that they were?" It will be said, "these men had common sense; they were capable of judging; they make no attempt at exaggeration, and they record the miracles in a simple, artless manner, as any historian would record events of common occurrence." Here we must proceed with caution. This is a vital point. This argument is not to be treated with a sneer, nor passed by as of no consequence. Before we proceed to comment on it we must warn the reader that it will not do to transfer our knowledge, opinions, views and feelings to the men of those ancient times. To do so, is a fallacy so glaring that we marvel that it should be so generally overlooked. Undoubtedly if some one in our day should claim the power to work miracles, such as raising the dead, &c., we should be exceedingly incredulous, and would not believe only after the closest scrutiny and the presentation of an overwhelming amount of evidence. But with the Evangelists, the case was quite different. They lived in an age and among a people who knew but little about

nature and her laws; a people who were exceedingly credulous and superstitious, and believed that miracles were wrought almost every day in their public streets. All the common and ordinary phenomena of nature they attributed to the direct agency of God or the Devil.

The Evangelists were Jews. They believed that in all past time God had wrought miracles in behalf of his chosen people, and that the time had arrived when there was to be the grandest display of almighty power for the redemption of the Jews from their bondage and degradation. Nothing was more natural then, than that they should expect from a man who claimed to be a religious reformer and deliverer, that he should work miracles. Hence, when they saw things done which they deemed miraculous it excited in them no surprise. The only thing that surprised them was that the miracles were so different in kind from what they were expecting. Christ was a remarkable man, commanding in his appearance, voice and manner. He possessed a great share of that personal, mysterious magnetism, which has been so often displayed by other men. He taught doctrines which were adapted to the wants of the common people. His miracles, such as healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, were such as are wrought at the present day; but which no one supposes to be miraculous. The power to cast out evil spirits was possessed by some men among the Jews, in common with Christ. All these things were thought to be miracles by the disciples, and believing them such, opened the way to their believing almost anything.

According to Lardner, the gospels were writ-

ten, the earliest not less than thirty-one, the latest thirty-five years after the death of Christ. Two of the supposed writers, Mark, and Luke, were not eye-witnesses of what they record. All four wrote with a view to give an outline history of the life and teachings of Christ. Nothing could be more natural than that they should record, not only what they knew, but also all that was currently believed by their fellow Christians of that day. The artless manner in which they recorded what to us would be incredible, is thus easily accounted for. And we are under no necessity of supposing that the writers were any other than honest men, aside from the tendency of religious enthusiasm and love of the marvelous to exaggeration. A critical examination of the gospels will enable us to detect such a tendency even in them. For proof, see Matt. iii. 5, 6: iv. 23–25.

Before the gospels were written, Christian congregations had been gathered in Syria, Egypt, Greece, Rome and other places. Soon after they were written Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews dispersed. The principal interest in these writings was confined to those who were interested in having them received as authentic. But few copies of them were in existence; only a few among the people could read them, and they were mainly in the hands of the clergy. There was no one to question their genuineness until some time after they first appeared: and when they began to be criticised, the writings of those who did question them were not long after destroyed.

If God chose miracles as a means of authenticating a revelation, it is certainly very singular that the means should prove so inadequate to the end. At the very time when miracles were wrought in the greatest

abundance, a great majority of those who are said to have witnessed them were not convinced by them. If the Jews had believed them to be genuine, would they have dared to proceed against Christ as they did? The miraculous portion of the gospels has always been a serious obstacle in the way of their reception by scientific men, and to-day hinders the progress of religion in the world.

Let us now take another view. We will suppose what the weight of evidence and authority justifies us in believing to be true; that these gospels were not written by the Evangelists, but were compiled by after writers at a time somewhat later than the date usually assigned them, and when nothing was more common than to forge books and attribute their authorship to distinguished persons in order to give them authority. Is it not possible, then, that some liberties may have been taken by the compilers? Whether they were written by the Evangelists or not, it is certain that they have been frequently copied; that they were finally separated from a mass of similar books, and pronounced to be authentic and authoritative by uninspired and fallible men. Can an incredible thing be proved by such evidence? The evidence is wholly *exparte.* No scientific test was applied to any of the miracles. No committee of scientific men examined to ascertain whether Lazarus was dead or not, and we have no opportunity to cross-question the witnesses.

As to the internal evidence of the infallibility of these books, we know that they contain incredible statements; direct contradictions, and glaring inconsistencies. As a specimen of the latter, we are told that at the baptism of Christ, John recognized him as

the Messiah. and boldly announced him as such to the people. Not only so, but the fact was confirmed by a miracle, the visible appearance of a dove and an audible voice from heaven. Yet subsequently to this impressive scene, John is represented as having been in doubt on the subject. Is it possible that if John was inspired, and had witnessed this miracle, he could have such doubts ?

The fact that the New Testament contains contradictions is sometimes denied. Let us examine and see. Take the account of the resurrection of Christ. All the accounts agree that after the crucifixion his body was placed in the tomb of a man who was one of his friends. Mark says, that when he was taken down from the cross, Pilate "marveled" that he was so soon dead. They all agree that the tomb was visited on Sunday morning, and that the body was not there. But they differ,

1. *As to the time of day.* Matthew says, it was "in the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week." Mark says it was "at the rising of the sun." Luke, that it was "very early in the morning." John, that it was "when it was yet dark." This difference is slight, and we only mention it to show that the visit was probably before it was *light.* How could Matthew know that an angel from heaven had been there and removed the stone from the door of the sepulchre? Neither he nor any of the disciples were there to see. Was not this a mere inference, from the fact that this stone was rolled away? He certainly testifies to something of which he was not an eye-witness. Nor could he have witnessed it, for it was done, if done at all, in the dark.

2. *Number of persons who visited the tomb.* John mentions but *one;* Matthew, *two;* Mark, *three;* Luke, *three*, and "certain other women who were with them." Now these gospels are supposed to have been written by independent witnesses. Here they are relating one of the most important events in the career of Christ, one on the truth or falsity of which the whole superstructure of supernatural religion depended. They are supposed to have been inspired in order to assist them to tell the truth. They should, then, have told "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." But if there was more than one person that went to the sepulchre, then, John did not tell the whole truth. If there was more than two, Matthew failed to do it; and if more than three, Mark did not tell it all. It was an important point, for much would depend on the number of witnesses of the resurrection.

3. *Number of persons who appeared to the visitors.* Mark says one "young man;" Matthew, one "angel;" Luke, "two men;" John, "two angels." If there was but one person, there were not two; if there were two, there were more than one. If the persons were *men*, they were not angels; if they were *angels*, they were not men.

4 *Time of the appearance of these men or angels.* According to John, not till Mary's second visit to the tomb, after Peter and John had been there. According to Matthew, Mark and Luke, it was when Mary first went to the place.

5. *Message of the persons seen at the tomb.* John said the two "angels" said to Mary Magdalene, "Woman! why weepest thou?" Luke says that *two men* announced to several women that Christ had risen.

Mark tells us that this announcement was made to *three* women by a "young man." Matthew says it was made to two women by the "angel" who had rolled away the stone.

6. *Conduct of the parties to whom the announcement was made.* Mark says, "they said nothing to any man." Matthew, Luke and John say that they hastened to carry the news to the disciples.

7. *The persons to whom Jesus appeared.* Matthew says, it was first to two women, then to the disciples. Mark, that it was to one woman, then to two of the disciples, and then to the eleven. Luke, that it was first to Cleopas and his companion, as they journeyed to Emmaus; then to Peter, then to the eleven. John says it was to one woman, then twice to the eleven.

8. *Places where Christ was seen.* Mark does not mention any particular place. Matthew says he was seen by two women on their way to tell the disciples what they had seen at the sepulchre; then on a mountain in Galilee. John says it was first to Mary Magdalene at the sepulchre, then at Jerusalem, though he does not name the place; and then to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. According to Luke, it was first on the way to, and at Emmaus, then at Jerusalem and Bethany.

9. According to Matthew, Christ directed the disciples to go to Galilee, and promised to meet them there. Mark says, this direction was given by a "young man," who was seen in the tomb. Luke and John are silent about this direction and meeting. According to Luke, the meetings of Christ with his disciples were all in Jerusalem and its vicinity, at one of which he directed them to "tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high."

10. Matthew says, the disciples went to Galilee and met Christ there. Luke, that they tarried in Jerusalem, and "were continually in the temple praising and blessing God."

11. Matthew and John say nothing about what became of Christ after his resurrection. Mark says, he ascended to heaven, but does not tell us when, where, nor how. Luke says, he was "carried up into heaven" from Bethany, but does not say in what way. He also tells us that his ascension took place on the evening of the third day after his resurrection. (See chap. xxiv. 21; compare verses 33, 36, 50.) But in Acts he tells us that he did not ascend until forty days after the resurrection, and that it took place from Mount Olivet.

Another remarkable thing in these accounts is, that the persons to whom Christ appeared could only with difficulty recognize him. When Mary saw him she did not know him, but supposed him to be the "gardener." Two of his disciples journeyed with him, conversed with him, spent some time in his company, and yet did not know who he was, but regarded him as a "stranger." When the eleven met in Galilee, where they went by appointment, expecting to see him, "some" of them "doubted." At his first appearance to them they were "affrighted," and "supposed they saw a spirit." From Mark xvi. 12, we learn that he appeared in different forms. Matthew tells of a phenomenon which occurred at the resurrection which is not mentioned by either Mark, Luke or John, viz.: a "great earthquake" and the descent of an "angel of the Lord from heaven." Of this we will speak in the proper place.

Whether Christ ascended to heaven in his natural

body, or whether his body passed through a change of any kind, we are not informed. If his body was changed so as to become etherealized and fitted for a residence in a spiritual sphere, and the Evangelists knew it, it is strange that they did not record that fact. The fact that they did not, is evidence that they did not perceive the incongruity and impossibility which was perceived by Paul, viz.: of "flesh and blood inheriting the kingdom of God."

In order to account for the difficulty of the disciples to recognize Christ, it may be said that his excitement, anxiety and sufferings previous to and at the crucifixion had so worn upon and emaciated him, as to change his appearance. But the same power that could impart life to his dead body, could also restore it to perfect physical health and integrity, and doubtless would do it. It may be said that his resurrection was so unexpected and attended by such marvelous occurrences, that the disciples were alarmed and bewildered. But veteran soldiers, who have been often under fire, are not apt to be alarmed out of their senses when they hear the familiar sound of the booming cannon. The disciples had been living in the very atmosphere of the marvelous and supernatural for three years. They had witnessed miracle after miracle; they had seen Lazarus raised from the dead, and associated with him without fear after his resurrection. Surely, after witnessing what they had, no display of divine power ought to alarm or astonish them. If it was not in body but in spirit that he appeared, as Prof. Bush taught, and as our modern Spiritualists teach, it is sufficient to say that this is expressly contradicted by Christ himself. (See Luke xxiv. 39, and John xx. 27.) Besides, if his resurrec

tion and appearance was of the spirit only, then it comes under the head of those appearances of the spirits of deceased persons to the living, about which we hear so much at the present day, and passes out of the domain of the miraculous.

Here, now, we have the testimony of four witnesses in relation to the great crowning event, the grand central fact of supernatural Christianity—an occurrence which, if it actually took place, was the most important of any in the world's history, involving the interest of every human being. And what is the testimony? It is vague, obscure, conflicting, inconsistent with itself, and self-contradictory. But worse still, even if it were not so, it utterly fails to establish the vital point in the story, viz.: the resurrection of Christ from the dead. If he rose, he must have risen in the dark, and not one of the witnesses was present when the occurrence took place. We can easily believe that he was placed in Joseph's tomb, but we have no proof that life was extinct when he was put there. It may be said that the wound in his side must have produced death. This is a gratuitous assumption. It might have been the means of his resuscitation from a swoon. Besides, the circumstance of the wound in the side, made by a Roman soldier, is narrated only by John, and totally ignored by all three of the other witnesses. We may believe that when the tomb was visited on Sunday morning, the body was not there, but this does not prove that a miracle was wrought to restore it to life. It is quite probable that some of his followers saw, or thought they saw, him after his body was laid in the tomb, but the fact that he was seen by *nobody else*, is certainly not a little suspicious. Is it likely that God would work a miracle to attest a

revelation, and then leave the miracle to be attested by such proof?

It may be said, that although there is some variation in these accounts, yet, "circumstantial variation with substantial agreement is characteristic of all human testimony." So it is. But testimony that is wholly false may have the same characteristic. Besides, although the rule is good as relates to *human* testimony, it is not applicable to *divine* testimony; and we are here dealing with what is supposed to be *infallible* testimony. Infallibility does not admit of degrees. Divine testimony cannot be partly true and partly false. It cannot be substantially true and circumstantially untrue.

If we scrutinize the accounts of miracles contained in the New Testament, we find most of the important ones attended by the same or similar difficulties.

1. *Miraculous birth of Christ.* Not only are the accounts of it inconsistent with themselves, but self-contradictory. Besides, if they were true, and generally believed by those who were acquainted with him, he must have started out on his mission with the prestige of a miraculous origin in his favor. But throughout his career he is generally spoken of as the son of Joseph, or the "carpenter's son." Although frequently reproached on account of his low birth and origin, he does not reply by asserting his birth of a virgin. No retrospective allusion to it is made either by himself or his disciples. No hint of it is given in the epistles of either Paul, Peter, James, Jude, or John. His townsmen were the most stubborn unbelievers in him. Even his own brothers and sisters, who ought to have known all about it, did not accept him as the Messiah, and on one occasion were about to arrest

him on the ground that he was a "lunatic" and was "mad." It is evident they had never heard of his miraculous birth.

2. *Flight into Egypt.* Matthew relates that immediately after his birth, his parents fled with him into Egypt, where they remained until the death of Herod. Matthew is the only New Testament writer who says anything about it, and he is contradicted by Luke, who says that eight days after his birth he was circumcised, and after the purification of his mother, he was presented to the Lord in the temple at Jerusalem, from which place they went to their own city, Nazareth, and dwelt there.

3. *Temptation.* Mark says, that "immediately" after his baptism, the "spirit" drove him into the wilderness, where he was forty days tempted of Satan. John wholly ignores the temptation, and says that the third day after his baptism he attended a wedding in Cana of Galilee. From Cana he went to Capernium, where he remained some days and then went to Jerusalem.

4. *Turning water into wine.* If this miracle really occurred, it is strange that John is the only Evangelist who has recorded it, especially, as it is said to have been the first, and certainly not the least wonderful. Is it credible that God should work a miracle in order to change one hundred and thirty-five gallons of water into wine for the accomodation of men who had already drank all that had been provided for the occasion, by their host? All the circumstances go to show that the account is a mere legend.

5. *The transfiguration.* This is related by Matthew, Mark and Luke, neither of whom were present to witness it, but wholly omitted by John, who is said to

have been an eye-witness. It is barely alluded to once, or is supposed to be, by Peter, but not mentioned by James, both of whom, it is said, were present.

6. *Commission of the Apostles.* We are told that Christ, just before his ascension, imparted the "Holy Ghost" to the Apostles, and commissioned them to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." And yet we find that Peter had to be convinced of the propriety of preaching to the Gentiles by a special revelation; and that he was called to account for so doing by his fellow-disciples, who subsequently, however, became convinced that he was right.

7. *Conversion of Paul..* We have four different accounts of this. One *historical* by Luke, in Acts 9th; two, *reported* by Luke; one in Acts 22d, the other in Acts 26th, as having been given by Paul; and the fourth by Paul himself, in Galatians, 1st chapter. In the narrative of it by Luke—he does not say whether the men who were with Paul saw the "great light" witnessed by Paul or not. But he says they heard the "voice." He also says, that although Paul was stricken to the ground, the men "stood speechless." In his report of Paul's speech to the Jews in Jerusalem, he makes him contradict the first statement by saying that the men "saw indeed the light but heard not the voice." And in his speech to Agrippa, he contradicts the other, by affirming that not only he, but all the men who were with him were prostrated. In Acts xxii. 10, it is said that the heavenly voice directed Paul to Damascus, where he would be told what was required of him. But in his speech to Agrippa, he says this same "voice" gave him his commission as an apostle at the very time when the

"light was seen, and the voice heard. Again, in his address to Agrippa, he says, that immediately after receiving his commission he commenced preaching "unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles." But in Galatians, 1st chap., he affirms that he did not confer with any of the other apostles; did not learn the gospel from them; did not go up to Jerusalem; but "went to Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years he went to Jerusalem to see Peter.

Finally, these writers state some things, which, if true, we should expect would be corroborated by other testimony; but they are not.

1. *The taxing of the Jews by Cæsar Agustus.* No Roman, or any other historian has mentioned any such tax. Judea was not a Roman province when Jesus was born; nor was Cyrenius Governor of Syria until ten or twelve years after that event.

2. *The slaughter of the innocents by Herod.* The account of this is not confirmed by any historian; not even by Josephus, who gives a full history of the life and reign of Herod, and an enumeration of his crimes.

3. *The darkness, the quaking of the earth; the rending the rocks, and vail of the temple, at the crucifixion: and the earthquake at the resurrection.* Not only is most of these phenomena unmentioned by all of the Evangelists except Matthew but no allusion is made to these occurrences anywhere else in the New Testament; nor in the annals of any nation in the world.

In view of these facts, to what other conclusion can we arrive, but that the theory of infallible inspiration has no foundation in truth? Nor is it probable that the testimony we have been reviewing is that

of eye and ear witnesses. If it is, their memory must have been very defective. That the New Testament writers were mistaken about some things we know. Paul and Barnabas did not agree, but contended "sharply" with each other. Peter and Paul differed in opinion, and Paul rebuked Peter publicly, charging him with dissimulation: both could not be right. Infallible men could not but agree. Doubtless, most of the events recorded by the writers of the gospels had some foundation in truth; but they were not recorded as they actually occurred, but as they were *believed* to have occurred. It is one thing to *see* an angel, it is quite another to *believe* that somebody else has. It is one thing for a phenomenon to occur, it is a very different thing to believe that it was produced by a special interposition of divine power. A record of the phenomena, a history of which we have in the gospels, was not made at the time they occurred, but long after, and at a time when the original facts had become greatly exaggerated. Undoubtedly the New Testament contains much valuable truth; but it also contains mistakes and errors. It is not therefore the ultimate standard of truth, nor only rule of faith and practice. It is ours to separate the truth from the error; to sift the wheat from the chaff, and to conserve the one and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

WERE THE GOSPELS AS WE NOW HAVE THEM WRITTEN BY THE PERSONS WHOSE NAMES THEY BEAR?

It is often asserted in more than a thousand pulpits and reiterated and repeated again and again in the most positive terms, that the proof of the genuineness of our present four gospels is so conclusive and overwhelming, that whoever denies it must be either very igno-

rant, imbecile or dishonest. In order to show upon what a weak foundation this sweeping assertion is made to rest, it is only necessary to examine the alledged evidence.

We are told that the history of these gospels can be traced up to the very time of the apostles and evangelists, and that the authorship of them by the writers to whom they are attributed is proved by the testimony of the immediate successors of the apostles. Now what are the facts? The immediate successors of the apostles are called "apostolic fathers," and those who succeeded them are called "Christian fathers." The testimony of the first named and those of the last named who lived before the New Testament collection was made, is all that is of any value. The apostolic fathers are Clemens, Ignatius, Polycarp, Papius, Barnabas, and Hermas. The first Christian fathers are Justin Martyr, Tatian, Irenæus, and Theophilus. The last father named, lived at about the time when the gospels were collected and compiled with the other books of the New Testament. The New Testament, however, was not declared to be the standard of truth by authority of the Church until after this. Now what do these witnesses say on the point in question?

These fathers all lived in the first century of the Christian era. If during that century there existed four different biographers of the life and teachings of Christ with which they were acquainted, and which they accepted as authoritative, we should expect them to make frequent use of them as authority for their own teachings. But what are the facts? In their writings which have come down to us, we find some express citations of some of the epistles of the

New Testament and some allusions to the same and also citations of apocryphal gospels, yet we do not find either of the four gospels cited, alluded to or referred to by name. We find a few passages in their writings attributed by them to Christ, corresponding in part to passages in the gospels; bnt whether these passages were mere traditional sayings which had been handed down orally, or were contained in writings older than our gospels, they do not inform us. That the latter is the fact we will now show to be probable.

The first mention of Matthew's gospel by name is by Papias, the first Christian father. He was bishop of Hierapolis, and lived in the fore part of the second century. He says that Matthew wrote a gospel in Hebrew, and in the time of Origen towards the middle of the third century it was the universal belief of the Church that such was the fact. At an early period that gospel was lost, and what became of it no one has told us. If our present gospel of Matthew is a translation of it, when, where or by whom it was translated no one knows. It is a very well authenticated fact, that in very early times there did exist a gospel called the gospel of the Nazarenes. Origen had a copy of it, and Jerome translated it; but neither the original nor the translation has come down to us. It is generally believed, however, that it was not the lost gospel of Matthew, although it somewhat resembled it. Papias then gives us no certain testimony in regard to our present gospel of Matthew.

Respecting the gospel of Mark, the historical evidence of its genuineness is more meager still. Papias says that Mark went with Peter to Rome, and while there acted as interpreter for Peter; he wrote down

what he could remember of what Peter told him, or what he heard him say. Clement of Alexandria says, that Mark, at the request of the Church at Rome, wrote a gospel, and Peter, when informed of it, hesitated about giving it his sanction; but finally did so in obedience to a vision. Irenæus says, that it was after the death of Peter that Mark wrote his gospel. Chrysostom says, that after writing it he went to Egypt. Epiphanius says he went to Egypt by the direction of Peter. Here now the testimony is so conflicting and inconsistent with itself as to be totally valueless.

As for Luke's gospel, we find no mention of it by any of the apostolic fathers, nor by any of the Christian fathers before the last of the second century. The same is true of the gospel of John. The first Christian writer who mentions the four gospels by name and attributes their authorship to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, was Irenæus who lived near the end of the second century. The history of these gospels can be traced with certainty up to the year 368, at which time the Council of Laodicea included them in a catalogue of the New Testament books omitting the book of Revelations. From that time they may be traced with tolerable certainty up to the time of Irenæus. From that time upward their history is involved in obscurity if not in total darkness.

It appears then, that in the writings of the apostolic and Christian fathers, there are passages which resemble passages in our four gospels, but in only a few instances are they verbatim resemblances. Second, they also contain passages which are not found in the gospels. Third, there are quotations in them from what were afterwards deemed apocryphal gospels.

Fourth, in none of the early writers are our gospels cited or referred to by name. From all which it appears that the first fathers might have denied all the passages contained in their writings which resembled passages in our gospels from writings which existed before our gospels were written, and there is no proof that they ever saw the gospels as we now have them.

But suppose we had the unequivocal testimony of the apostolic and Christian fathers to the genuineness of the gospels, what would be the value of their testimony? The weight of evidence must be estimated by the intelligence and veracity of the witnesses. What then is the reputation of these fathers for intelligence and veracity? On this point we have the testimony of the great ecclesiastical historian, Mosheim, who wrote in the interest of Christianity, that the "apostolic fathers and the other writers, who, in the infancy of the Church, employed their pens in the cause of Christianity, were neither remarkable for their learning nor for their eloquence. On the contrary, they express the most pious and admirable sentiments in the plainest and most illiterate style." The writings of these men show, conclusively, that many of them were weak men; that all of them were extremely credulous; that they endorsed not only all the marvelous stories in circulation in their day about Christ and his apostles, but all the extravagant fictions of the Greek and Roman mythology. They sometimes employed known falsehood in support of their cause; and forged books to prove their doctrines. Mosheim says, the Christian fathers adopted and acted upon the maxim, that "it is lawful to lie for the truth." Whatever weight we attach to their testi-

mony it is equally good for the apocryphal writings and for the Pagan mythology.

In the absence of any historical proof of the genuineness of the gospels we are led to the inquiry, is there any internal evidence which is sufficient to establish them as genuine? Here the evidence is all the other way, as the following considerations go to show. First, the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, so far as they relate to the addresses, parables and miracles of Christ, bear a remarkable resemblance to each other. Not only do they relate the same things, but in many instances they relate them in the same or nearly the same words. Now this resemblance is in the Greek gospels, whereas, Christ spoke in the language in use in Palestine, and his words, therefore, had to be translated into Greek by his biographers. Now it is incredible that three independent writers should report the sayings of Christ, and translate his words into a different language from that in which he spake, and that there should be this verbal agreement in their report. Second, in the introduction to Luke's gospel, he addresses himself to a personage whom he calls "most excellent Theophilus." In those times this title belonged only to persons of rank and distinction. It is remarkable that in all the writings of the early Christians, we find no other mention of such a personage until the time of Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, who lived near the close of the second century. He is said to have been a principal actor in collecting and arranging the books of the New Testament and putting them in their present form. It is highly probable that the four gospels were compiled from previously existing writings about that time, and if so, they could not have

been written by the Evangelists in their present form. Of John's gospel, it may be said it is quite unlike either of the others. This unlikeness may be seen in the following particulars. 1. In the fourth gospel there is no record of the numerous parables found in the other three, nor any intimation that Christ adopted that mode of instruction. 2. The discourses attributed to Christ in the one, are entirely different from those in the others. In John's gospel they are lengthy, systematic, enigmatical, dogmatic, and abound in self-assertion. In the others they are fragmentary, plain, practical, and exhibit a spirit of meekness and humility. 3. The style of the discourses in John is entirely different from those in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This difference is so great as to justify us in saying that if Christ spoke as the first three gospels represent him, he could not have spoken as John represents him, and *visa versa.* 4. John omits all mention of the miraculous cures of demoniacs, to which the other writers seem to have attached so much importance. There are other differences which might be pointed out, but those above are sufficient for our present purpose. There is but one clue to the authorship of John's gospel, and that is the fact that a comparison of the gospel with the first of the three epistles attributed to John in the New Testament, shows that the style and often the very ideas and words attributed to John the Baptist and Christ in the gospel, correspond exactly with the style, ideas and words of that epistle. From this fact we infer that whoever was the author of the epistle was the author of the gospel also. Now, although the second and third epistles of John were considered doubtful for a long time by the Church; the first was always

received as genuine. This points to John as the author of the fourth gospel. But if John was the author of it, was it originally written in the form in which we now have it? We know that an unknown writer added to it, (see John xxi. 24–25,) and to what extent he might have further tampered with it no one knows.

But suppose that each of the gospels could be proved to have been written by their reputed authors, could we implicitly rely on their testimony? A few considerations will lead us to see that we could not. 1. The reputed authors were ignorant and superstitious, predisposed to believe in the marvelous, and regarded all the phenomena of nature as produced by a special divine providence. 2. They were not eye and ear witnesses of all that they record. They relate occurrences which took place when they could not have been present. For example, the remarkable circumstances attendant on the birth of Christ, both before and after the event. The temptation of Christ, the transfiguration of Christ, related by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, who were not present, and wholly omitted by John who is said to have witnessed it. The marvelous circumstances connected with the birth of John the Baptist; the report of the preaching of the Baptist; the prayer of Christ in Gethsemane; Peter's denial of Christ; the dream of Pilate's wife; the conversation between Pilate and the priests; that between Judas and the priests, and that between the soldiers and priests; and finally the alleged fact of the resurrection of Christ. 3. The gospels were written in the interest of a cause which the writers had espoused and which they were desirous to promote. Now we cannot rely implicitly on the statements of historians,

who, we know, were biased and prejudiced in their minds, and who derived their information not from personal observation, but received it from common report. We are all of us acquainted with men whose intelligence and honesty we would not question; but whose statements in relation to an extraordinary occurrence made under the circumstances in which the writers of the gospels were placed, we could not accept. Unless these writers were more than human, they certainly were liable to be mistaken. They constantly misunderstood and misapprehended Christ's words while he was living, and what assurance have we that they did not do the same thing after he was dead?

It may be said that these writers were infallibly inspired, and thus preserved from all liability to err.

The question whether they were or not, will be next considered.

WERE THE WRITERS OF THE FOUR GOSPELS INFALLIBLY INSPIRED?

The affirmative of this question is often asserted in the most positive terms, and it has been accepted as truth very generally in the Christian world. It only requires the statement of a few facts to show that it is a wholly gratuitous assumption.

1. There is no proof that either God or Christ, ever directed or authorized them to write the books in question.

2. There is no proof that they had the most distant idea that these books would be collected, comprised in a volume, and transmitted to succeeding generations.

3. They nowhere assert or intimate that they possessed such inspiration.

It may be said that if they do not make this claim for themselves, Paul makes it for them, where he asserts that, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." We reply that Paul's declaration has nothing to do with the question before us, first, because it says not one word about *infallible* inspiration, and second, because when he made the declaration the gospels had not been written, and were therefore not in existence. We may be told that Christ promised to his disciples the aid of the "Holy Spirit," which would direct them what to say in all emergencies, and "lead them into all truth." Without questioning whether Christ made such a promise or not, and taking it for granted that he did, we proceed to inquire; was the promise fulfilled to the extent of making the disciples infallible? The Holy Spirit we are informed in the the gospels was bestowed upon the disciples between the time of Christ's crucifixion and his ascension into heaven. From this time forward were the disciples infallible? The numerous contradictions, discrepencies, and mistakes contained in the gospels, some of which we have pointed out in this book, prove either that they were not written by the disciples, or if they were, they were not infallibly inspired. Besides, when the questions came before the disciples of whether the gospel should be preached to the Gentiles, and whether the Gentiles should observe the ceremonial law of Moses, they settled them not by authority of infallible inspiration, but the first question was settled in Peter's mind by a special vision, and the other by calling a Council of the disciples to consider the question, to deliberate upon it, to discuss it, and after different

opinions had been expressed on it, it was finaly decided in accordance with a proposal made by James who occupied a middle ground on the subject. Now, if the disciples were conscious of the possession of infallibility, or if they believed themselves to be infallible, here was a fine opportunity for them to assert it, and to make a display of it, but they seem not to have thought of any such thing.

The failure in the fulfilment of this promise said to have been made to the disciples, is paralleled by the failure of other promises of a similar nature. The writers of the gospels, state that Christ promised in the most emphatic and unequivocal manner that after his ascension into heaven he would return to earth during the life time of some at least of his disciples, that then he would be seated upon "the throne of his glory, and his disciples should also be seated" on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. The generation then living was not to pass away before this promise was to be fulfiled. (Matt. x, 23, xiv, 29–35 ; Mark xiii, 28–31 ; Luke xxi, 27–32 ; Matt. xvi, 27, 28 ; Mark viii, 38, and ix, 1 ; Luke ix, 26, 27 ; Matt. xix, 28.) In the Epistles of the New Testament this coming of Christ is often alluded to, and the belief expressed that it was to take place during the natural life of the writers. (See 2 Thes. i, 6–10 ; 1 Cor. xi, 6 ; 1 Tim. vi, 14 ; James v, 7, 8 ; 1 Thess. iii, 13, and v, 23 ; 2 Thess. iii, 5; Heb. x, 25, and 37 ; 1 John ii, 28 ; 1 Thess. v, 1–4, and iv, 13–17 ; 1 Cor. xv, 51, 52 ; 1 Peter vii, 7.) It is a well known fact that the early Christians lived in the constant expectation of the speedy return, or second advent of Christ to this world, at which time the dead were to be raised, the living changed from mortality to immortality, Christ's

kingdom established here on earth, and the saints to rule and reign with him in his kingdom.

Another promise said to have been made by Christ was that the believers in his gospel should be endowed with the power of casting out devils, of speaking with new tongues, of being invulnerable to the poison of serpents, or even of the most deadly poison drank by them. They should also be able to restore the sick to health by the laying on of hands. See Mark xvi, 17, 18.

Now as there has been no such personal second advent of Christ, as the dead have not been raised, nor the living changed, as no thrones have been established for the occupancy of the disciples, and as believers in the gospel have not the power to do the things which were predicted, therefore these promises have not been fulfilled. It follows that either Christ made no such promises, or if he did, he was mistaken in his predictions. Take whichever horn of the dilema we may, it follows that the gospel writers were not infallibly inspired. Either they were mistaken in attributing these promises to Christ, or they were mistaken in believing that they would be fulfilled.

What we Do and what we Do Not know about the Bible.

The Old Testament is a collection of Jewish sacred books. The number of them is 39. They were written by different authors and at different periods of time. At what particular time the collection was made, and who the writers were, as also, the precise time when they were written we do not know. We are equally ignorant in regard to the persons by whom

the collection was made. Some of the books are more than 2500 years old. During the times of Samuel, David, and Solomon, literature began to flourish, records were made, histories and narratives were written, and songs and hymns were composed. The first four books of the Pentateuch originated in the time of Solomon, 1019 years before Christ, but the Pentateuch was not completed until the time of Josiah 641 before Christ. It was commenced 432 years after the death of Moses, and finished in the form in which we now have it 810 years after his death. The whole five books are in great part compilations from previously existing documents of the writers of which nothing is known. The last book of the Old Testament was written 397 before Christ. The Hebrew Bible abounds in repetitions of history, narratives, genealogies, laws, oracles, proverbs, sentences, and thoughts. If these repetitions were expunged from it, it would reduce the volume to nearly one-half its present size. The style of composition of these books is very different. In some of them it is pure, grand, and beautiful, in others it is low, vulgar, mean, and poor. During 2551 years these books existed only in manuscript and during the entire history of the Jews as a nation the care of them was committed to the priests. After the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity 518 years before Christ, they ceased to speak the Hebrew language, and from that time until 130 before Christ, a period of 388 years these books were locked up in a dead language, and could be read only by a very few of the Jewish people. The books were originaly written in continuous letters and lines, without any division into chapters, sentences, or words, and without punctuation. The work of copying them was a

difficult and laborious task and even the reading of them was attended with great difficulty. Only a few copies were extant and these were held to be of great pecuniary value, placing them beyond the reach of the mass of the people. In regard to the preservation of these books and the prevention of them from corruption the Jews have a variety of traditions some of which are fabulous, others contradictory, and none of them reliable. The first mention of the collection of these books, as a whole, was by Jesus, the Son of Sirach, 130 before Christ. The first translation of the books into another language was commenced about 286 before Christ, and finished 130 before Christ. This was a Greek version called the Alexandrian, or version of the Seventy. It was the one in use in the time of Christ and his Apostles, and quoted from by them. This version was followed by several other Greek versions. In the year 405 of the Christian era Jerome finished a Latin translation from the Hebrew. From this time we will consider the Old Testament in connection with the Christian Scriptures.

The New Testament is a collection of books written during the first two centuries of the Christian era. They are in number 27. Some of them are historical but most are epistolary. They were written by different persons at different times and places. But excepting most of the epistles attributed to Paul, and a few attributed to other writers, we do not positively know the precise time when, place where, nor persons by whom they were written. Most if not all the epistles were written before the gospels. In regard to the origin, authorship, and history of the historical books, i. e. the four gospels, but little is known with certainty, up to the time when they were separated

from a number of writings relating to the same subject, which was near the end of the second century. As Mr. Froude well observes, "there exists no ancient writings whatever, of such vast moment to mankind of which so little can be authentically known." We may add that there is no part of human history of equal importance that is involved in so much obscurity as that which relates to the birth, life and death, of Jesus Christ, and the life and death, of his Apostles. Notwithstanding the vast amount of time and labor which learned men have expended in endeavoring to clear up the subject, their efforts thus far have been unavailing. It is known, however, that as Moshiem says, "not long after the ascension of Christ, several histories of his life and doctrines, full of pious frauds and fabulous wonders, were composed by persons whose intentions perhaps, were not bad, but whose writings discovered the greatest superstition and ignorance. Nor was this all; productions appeared which were imposed upon the world by fraudulent men, as the writings of the holy apostles." It is equally well know that at a very early period in the history of the Christian church differences of opinion sprung up among Christians, occasioning the most fierce and bitter controversies, and that the defenders of their respective opinions did not scruple to forge whole books and ascribe their authorship to Christ or some of his apostles, in order to prove their doctrines.

The books of the New Testament were selected from a number of other gospels and epistles, but at what particular time or by whom, is not certainly known. Irenæus who lived A. D. 182, is the first of the Fathers who mentions the four gospels by name. In the year 368 the Council of Laodicea gave a catalogue of

all books in the New Testament. In 397 at the third council of Carthage the books of the Old and New Testament, as they now stand in the Bible were pronounced canonical, and the reading of the apocryphal books in the churches was forbidden. At the council of Chalcedon in 401 the New Testament was used as the ultimate standard of appeal, and a decree of Pope Innocent 1, about that time, confirming the selection which had been previously made, established the canon as it now stands.

Most of the original manuscripts from which our New Testament books were selected have long been lost. All that are now extant have been collected and published in a book called the Apocryphal New Testament. This book is about the same size as the one supposed to be genuine.

During 1200 years or until the art of printing was discovered the books of the New Testament were in manuscript only and mainly in the hands of the clergy. The first translation of the Bible into English was by Wickliffe in 1360. This was not printed except the New Testament part, and that was not done until 1731. The first printed Bible in English was that ot Tindal and Coverdale in 1526. Our present English version was made by order of King James I and printed in 1613.

The Bible as a whole has been frequently copied, numerous translations have been made of it and it has been printed in all the principle languages in the world.

The division of the Bible into chapters was made by Hugo, who lived about A. D. 1240. The division of the chapters into verses was by Mordecai Nathan, a Jewish Rabbi in 1475.

Our English Bible was translated not from the original manuscripts of the writers, but from copies of the original, none of which in the Old Testament were older than the 9th century of the Christian era, and none of the New Testament older than the sixth century.

Notwithstanding the opinion which for a long time prevailed, that in a mysterious and miraculous manner God had taken care to preserve the inviolable purity of the text of the Bible, or if not that, at least the purity of the original, the investigations of learned men have proved that among all the copies of the original Hebrew of the Old Testament, and those of the Greek of the New Testament, there is not one that is perfect, or any two of either that exactly agree. And among all the translations and versions, whether of private individuals or of authorized bodies of men, there is not two that are alike. Kennicott and De Rossi spent thirty-six years in collecting ancient Hebrew and Samaritan manuscripts of the Old Testament. They obtained and compared more than 1200 copies, and De Rossi published four quarto volumes of various readings found in about 400 manuscripts which he examined. The variations amounted to over 130,000.

The New Testament contains seven books, the authenticity of which was disputed for a long time by many in the early Christian church, and Dr. Lardner says, they are "not fit to be alledged as affording sufficent proof of any doctrine." These books are Hebrews, James, 2nd and 3d John, Jude, 2nd Peter, and Revelations. It also contains passages which by some learned men are deemed to be spurious. Such as Matt. i, 17-25, and whole of 2nd chapter; the 1st and

2nd chapters of Luke, except the four first verses, and many other accounts and verses which are regarded as interpolations into the original text.

In our common English Bible there are a great number of additions which are not contained in the original, some of which at least are liable to mislead the reader. Such are all the words printed in italics. These were supplied by the translators. So also the headings of the chapters, and in the upper margin of the pages.

Finally, the work of collecting, arranging, copying and translating the books of the Bible has been done by human hands, by uninspired and fallible men; and by human authority alone it has been pronounced infallible in its teachings.

Obscurity of the Bible.

That the Bible is very obscure in its teachings is generally admitted by those who know most about it. No book was ever published to which such a variety of interpretations have been given. Thousands of commentaries have been written upon it, by men of equal talent and learning, no two of which give it the same exposition. Out of the millions of believers in the infallibility of its inculcations, it is not probable that any two could be found who would agree in their understanding of its contents. This is not wonderful if we consider that the books were composed by some forty different authors, who lived in different ages of the world, and if we allow that the writers, like all other men, were liable to entertain conflicting views and to be mistaken in their opinions. But on the supposition that they wrote us they were directed by un-

erring inspiration, it is truly surprising that they have not written, so as to be clearly and definitely understood. What kind of revelation is that which requires thousands of elaborate tomes to explain it, and then when the explanation is given requires a whole library of books to explain the explanation? A few of the Biblical writers seem to claim some sort of inspiration, but precisely what they meant by it we do not know. We have plenty of men in our day who talk very much as the ancient prophets did. They tell us of what the Lord has said to them, and come to us with messages which they claim to be direct from God. They seem to attribute their impressions, concerning religion to the special agency of God. In this they may be very honest and yet be mistaken, and so might the Scripture writers, referred to.

The Bible has been very aptly compared to a box of lettered wooden blocks. These blocks by being properly arranged can be made to express anything the manipulator desires to have expressed. So by arranging certain texts of Scripture, the Bible may be made to teach nearly all of the conflicting creeds of the numerous Christian sects. The style of the Bible is often highly figurative. It abounds in hyperboles, tropes, similes, parables and symbols. This makes it susceptible of a variety of interpretations, and renders the real meaning of the writers difficult to ascertain. The celebrated John Leland was a distinguished and very successful Baptist clergyman for more than sixty years. During all this time he was a close student of the Bible. He availed himself of all the means in his power to ascertain the true import of its teachings. He counted every book, chapter, verse, word, and letter between its lids. When eighty-six

years of age he made the following candid confession; "If God formed me with talents to be an expositor of the holy scriptures, I have criminally neglected to improve the talents which he gave me, for now when I am eighty-six years old, I have not the least understanding of the last nine chapters of Ezekiel; and the same is true of a great part of the Bible. I read commentators, but remain ignorant. My prayer is that I may know and practice the truth, but I remain under the cloud, groveling in the dark." *See the writings of Elder John Leland, page 733.*

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THE BIBLE?

Select from it all that is valuable, especially the grand and glorious, theoretical and practical truths which it contains; bind these into a volume, publish an immense edition of the same, and put a copy into the hands of every human being. Treasure up the remainder and carefully preserve it as a relic of the folly and superstition of past ages.

BIBLICAL FACTS WORTH REMEMBERING.

1. The Bible contains but two definitions of God. These are, "God is a spirit," "God is love."

2. The word inspiration occurs but twice in the Bible. Once it is applied to the human understanding, and once to the Jewish sacred Scriptures.

3. The word religion is not contained in the Old Testament, and occurs but three times in the New. The word religious occurs twice, and only in the New Testament.

4. There is but one definition of religion in the Bible, and that is in James i, 27.

5. The phrase "born again," occurs but three times in the Bible. It was used twice by Christ and once by Peter.

6. The Jews had no definite ideas on the subject of a future state of existence, nor of the existence of a Devil, and had no proper names for any of the angels until they were carried captive to Babylon. They derived their opinions on these subjects not from their sacred scriptures but from the Magian religion.

A Chapter of Definitions.

God. The Power that controls the universe of matter and mind. The magnum bonum, or sum of all power; the summum bonum, or sum of all good; the self-existent cause of all causes and effects.

Devil. That which stands in the way of human happiness.

Heaven. A state or condition of the mind and feelings consequent on the consciousness of moral rectitude.

Hell. Self reproach and condemnation for doing intentionally what we know, or believe to be wrong.

Moral Agency. The power of choosing to do what we believe to be right in preference to doing what we think to be wrong.

Free Agency. A self-determining power claimed by some to be possessed by man by which he is enabled to act in opposition to the strongest motives and contrary to his strongest inclinations.

Self-interest. The main-spring of human action. When unenlightened and misdirected it tends to misery. When properly directed it produces the highest good. Not until men learn that their best interest

and chief good consists in promoting the interest and happiness of their fellowmen will they know how to happify themselves. Man is necessarily a selfish being, but to human selfishness manifested in this way certainly no one can object.

CONSCIENCE. A feeling which inclines us to do what we believe to be right, and reproaches us for doing what we think to be wrong.

WISDOM. The knowledge that the order of Nature is such that the consequences of well or ill doing follow by an immutable law and that this order cannot be departed from, even by God himself, without his ceasing to be God.

FOLLY. The belief that God's moral government is based on contingencies, so that the consequences of wrong doing may or may not be experienced by the wrong doer.

RELIGION. Knowledge of the relation which man sustains to God, and of the duties which grow out of that relation, and the proper direction of the religious faculties.

FALSE RELIGION. Imperfect knowledge of man's relation to God, and misdirection of the religious faculties.

MORALITY. Knowledge of the relation which man sustains to his fellowmen and faithful discharge of the duties which grow out of that relation.

MIRACLE. An effect without a sufficient cause. Various definitions have been given of this term. If it is defined to signify a wonder, then the world is full of miracles, for surely it abounds with wonders on every hand. If it signifies a suspension or counteraction of the laws of Nature then miracles are plenty, for the laws of Nature are being counteracted every

day. It is a law of nature that water should seek its own level and run down hill, but by applying sufficient force it may be prevented from doing either. Nature's law makes all heavy bodies tend to the centre of our earth, but any of us can take hold of a pebble or a piece of iron and force it to go in a horizontal or perpendicular direction contrary to its natural tendency. Do we in all such cases work a miracle? If by miracle is meant a special act of Divine power, without the intervention of law, we are involved in an inextricable difficulty; for how can it be proved that any event occurs without law? The time has been when all the phenomena of nature were regarded as special acts of Divine providence. This view is now admitted to be erroneous. May it not be equally erroneous to suppose any event to occur without law? If we say of any given phenomenon that it is miraculous simply because we do not know the cause of it, what is this but asserting that we know the cause of it when at the same time we admit we do not? Besides, if all phenomena of the cause of which we are ignorant is miraculous, then again the world is full of miracles, for there are plenty of phenomena of which we know not the cause. The truth is that nothing is miraculous that is produced by an adequate cause, and therefore if miracles exist at all, they must consist of effects without sufficient cause. It has been well said that the greatest conceivable miracle would be that any intelligent man should understandingly believe in miracles. So far as we know anything about the system of Nature the Universe is governed by an order which is uniform and invariable, and no deviation from the unchangeableness of this order can

be admitted without more and better proof than has even yet been adduced.

FAITH. Confidence or trust in a thing or being based on what we know or think we know of that thing or being. There can be no faith that is not founded on real or supposed knowledge.

BELIEF. An opinion produced by evidence either real or imaginary. From the nature of the mind evidence amounting to proof and perceived to be such must necessarily produce conviction. Men are passive in the reception of their opinions; they can by no means believe or disbelieve just what they will or wish, contrary to the evidence as it appears to them. The utmost they can do is to deny their convictions, or profess to have convictions when they have not. Rational belief cannot be induced by bribes or threats by promises of reward for believing, nor by threats of punishment for unbelief. To undertake to gain the belief of men by bribes or deter them from unbelief by threats is at the best only to make of them hypocrites and slaves.

NATURE. The universe of matter and of mind. The aggregate of everything that exists.

TRUTH. A fact in Nature. When stated in human language it is a statement in conformity with fact. Truth in the aggregate is the aggregate of all the facts that ever did, do now, or ever will exist in the Universe.

MATTER. A form of Spirit tangible to the human senses.

SPIRIT. A form of Matter not cognizable by the senses. All cognizable forms of matter are incarnations of the infinite spirit of the universe. As forms they are finite and perishable, but the material of

which they are composed is indestructible, and when these forms are destroyed, enters into the composition of other forms. Thus the infinite is being constantly resolved into the finite and the finite into the infinite. This is the real work of creation which never had a beginning and can never have an end. Nothing is lost in nature. Only two things can be annihilated, one is form, the other is phenomena. The form of the human body, or of any other body which exists today, must ultimately be decomposed and resolved back into its original elements to enter into the composition of other forms. The lightnings flash and thunders roar so visible to our senses for a moment, in a moment ceases to be, and although a similar phenomenon may appear the same, one can never be reproduced. That the infinite Spirit of the universe possesses intelligence is proved from the fact that intelligence exists in all animated beings. What nature does not contain could never be derived from nature. The whole question of the immortality and personal consciousness and identity of the human mind may be settled by simply deciding the question, is mind an entity or a phenomenon. The arguments usually adduced to prove the immortal personal consciousness of man are merely inferential, and however logical they may be, they do not demonstrate, but only render it probable. All that relates to the future beyond the present moment relates to the unknown, and is a mere matter of opinion. For wise and good purposes Nature has so ordered it that we can have no positive knowledge of the future. Every human being knows or believes just as much about the future as in his present state of development he ought to know. He who cannot be thankful to God for all

tnat is past and trust him for all that is to come is "without hope and without God in the world." However real the future may be it is unknown to us. The present is real ; we live in the present, and if we were more solicitous to discharge with fidelity the duties of the present and less disinclined to trust God to dispose of us as he in his infinite wisdom and goodness deems best, it would be far better for the interest and happiness of us all. The reality of a future state of existence for man can be demonstrated positively only by the reappearance in proper person, in a spiritual but tangible form, of some person with whom we were well acquainted and whom we knew to have died beyond the possibility of doubt. Some men in our day claim to have this evidence. We will not dispute it; if the fact be so let it be proved.

NATURAL. Any event or phenomonon which occurs in the established order of events or which constitutes both an effect and a cause in the interminable chain of causes and effects which never had a beginning and can have no end.

SUPERNATURAL. That which is above or beyond Nature. As Nature, or the universe of matter and mind is infinite, boundless, and illimitable, there can be nothing above or beyond it. The power that controls our bodies resides in and not outside of the body. There can be no outside to that which is boundless in extent. The infinite power of the Universe pervades every part of it and is present in every phenomonon of matter or of mind. No event can be supernatural.

REVEAL. To make known to the mind.

REVELATION. That which is made known to the mind, and of which the mind was previously ignorant.

As all our knowledge is obtained through the medium of the senses, whatever is communicated to the mind must be communicated through that medium. Whenever men claim to have knowledge which they have derived through some other channel, we may set them down as self-deceived or imposters.

INSPIRATION. The voluntary or spontaneous action of the inherent powers and faculties of the human mind. All men are inspired but not all to the same extent. The highest inspiration is found in those men whose various faculties are harmoniously developed to the greatest degree.

AXIOMATIC, OR SELF-EVIDENT TRUTH.

It is an incontrovertible fact that all human beings are introduced into the present state of existence in a condition of entire ignorance, and all that they ever know they are obliged to learn. By means of the senses, which are the windows of the mind, we become acquainted with ourselves and with external nature around us, and all its varied phenomena. Without sensation there could be no consciousness; without consciousness no intelligence, and without intelligence the mind would be a blank. By observation and experience we acquire a knowledge of facts as they exist in nature. These facts we make the basis of what we call reasoning. We can reason only from what we know or think we know. Reasoning consists in deducing inferences from real or supposed facts. If the premises from which we reason are correct, and our reasoning is correct, the conclusion to which we arrive will be correct. On the other hand, if our premises are false, or if our reasoning is

false, the conclusion will also be false. It must not be forgotten that we can reason correctly from false premises, but in all such cases the conclusion will be as false as the premises themselves. It is highly important, therefore, that in all our reasonings we be quite sure that our premises are correct. The conclusions to which we arrive by the process of reasoning constitute our opinions, as distinguished from what we know by the evidence of our senses.

Now truth may be classified under three heads: 1. Physical truth; 2. Intellectual truth; 3. Moral truth. The first consists of facts as they exist in nature, and must be verified by the testimony of the senses. The second consists of opinions which must be sanctioned by sound logical reasoning. The third consists of our opinions in regard to our obligations and duties toward our fellow-men, and must be tested by our sense of right and justice, and by their practical utility in the world.

Nature, then, is the great standard of truth, and to her teachings must be made the ultimate appeal. Our understanding of her teachings may be imperfect; our interpretation of her lessons may be erroneous, but Nature never lies, she makes no mistakes, commits no errors, is guilty of no blunders. Every man must interpret her as best he can. Truth is the natural food of the mind, as bread is of the body. All truth necessary for man to know, is adapted to his capacities and powers. Truth must be its own witness. It must approve itself to our senses, our reason and our moral sense.

When the mind has attained sufficient maturity, it readily distinguishes truth from error, just as we learn to distinguish food that is wholesome from that

which is unwholesome. As the minds of men are in different stages of development, all cannot see alike, and hence there are, and must be, different opinions among them. But notwithstanding the great diversity of human beliefs, there are certain cardinal principles which will be accepted as true by all intelligent men. These doctrines are so obviously true that no argument is needed to sustain them. The simple statement of them in an intelligible form is sufficient to carry conviction to every unbiased mind. These truths we call axiomatic or self-evident, and they constitute, perhaps, the best test to apply to every dogma or proposition which may be presented for our consideration.

We will now make a statement of some of these self-evident truths, and point out the manner of their application.

1. The whole of a thing is greater than a part of it.

2. Nothing can be, and not be, at the same instant.

3. Two solid substances cannot occupy the same space at the same instant of time.

4. No created being can be a hundred years old the moment he begins to exist.

5. No created being can be equal to his creator.

6. No truth can contradict any other truth.

7. Two contradictory statements cannot both be true.

8. A finite mind cannot comprehend the infinite.

9. Infinite attributes are uncommunicable.

10. Under the government of a being who is all-wise, all-powerful and all-good, absolute evil cannot possibly exist.

11. An absolutely good being cannot create an absolutely bad being.

12. Only one being possessed of infinite attributes can exist in the Universe.

13. God cannot create a totally depraved being.

14. A superior being who creates an inferior, knowing that he will be cursed by his existence, is not good to that being.

15. A law to which there is annexed a penalty which may be averted, can have no restraining influence over viciously inclined men.

16. A law having a penalty which, if inflicted, will defeat the object of the law, is not a wise law.

17. There can be no end to that which is endless.

18. To inflict punishment upon an innocent person, which is due only to the guilty, is a double act of gross outrage upon every principle of justice.

19. No being can incur guilt or punishment for acting in accordance with the laws of his own nature.

20. The number one cannot be made to express more than one.

21. The number three cannot be made to express less than three.

22. No man is under any obligation to believe what appears to him to contradict his reason or sense of right and justice.

23. No incredible statement is to be believed, unless it is sustained by an amount of evidence, which would make it more unreasonable to reject the evidence than it would be to accept the statement.

24. The remission of the penalty of a law presupposes or implies that the penalty is not just and wise.

We propose now to apply the above truths as a test to some of the dogmas of popular Christianity. We

shall see that they crash through the creeds and commandments of men, scattering them like leaves before a mighty wind. These dogmas, when put in the form of propositions, may be stated as follows:

1. There exists a personal being called the Devil, a creature of God, all of whose attributes are positively evil, unmixed with the least particle of good. Compare this with truth No. 11.

2. Mankind are born into the world with totally corrupt and depraved natures, and all their inclinations are to evil, and only evil, and that continually. Compare with truths Nos. 13 and 19.

3. God is one, but nevertheless exists in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and yet there are not three persons, but one person. Compare with truths Nos. 20 and 21.

4. Jesus Christ, although a creature of God, (see Rev. iii. 14,) yet possessed all the attributes of Divinity. Compare with truths Nos. 9 and 12.

5. Evil is positive and absolute, inasmuch as it is destined to reign over millions of human beings forever, thereby rendering their existence a curse instead of a blessing. Compare with truths Nos. 10 and 14.

6. The penalty of God's law, after it has been incurred by the transgressor, may be averted by timely repentance. Compare with truths Nos. 15 and 24.

7. The penalty of God's law, if inflicted on the violater of it, will place him in a condition that will forever render it impossible for him to obey the law. Compare with truth No. 16.

8. The penalty of God's law is endless punishment, and yet Christ endured the penalty in his sufferings and death upon the cross. Compare with truth No. 17.

9. The penalty of God's law, which had been incurred by all mankind, was inflicted on Jesus Christ, who had violated no law, incurred no penalty, and was an entirely innocent person. Compare with truth No. 18.

10. There are certain theological and religious doctrines which we are required to believe, whether they appear to us reasonable or not, and for not believing them we incur the penalty of endless damnation. Compare with truth No. 22.

11. The Bible contains statements in relation to occurrences and events which, if the same were made at the present day, we would not believe even on the authority of living witnesses, and yet we are requested to believe these statements on the authority of men who lived and wrote long after the events are said to have happened, men who could not have been eye-witnesses of what they relate, and of whose competency as witnesses, and reputation for truth and veracity we know nothing. Compare with truth No. 23.

Now as truth is always consistent with itself, and as the above eleven propositions directly contradict the correspondingly numbered propositions in the list of self-evident truths, it follows that one or the other must be false. Which it is, the reader can judge.

CONCLUSION.

Of what has been said in the foregoing pages, this is the sum. From the earliest dawn of intelligence and religion among men, truth and error, fact and fiction, reason and superstition have been strangely commingled. He who lends a helping hand in the work of sifting the wheat from the chaff, is a public benefactor. Wherever ignorance prevails, superstition abounds; wherever reason predominates superstition dies. First of all it is necessary to assert and maintain the supremacy and authority of pure reason over all authority which is opposed to reason. No one thing has served more to perpetuate ignorance and superstition than the idea that the Supreme Ruler of the Universe interferes in an exceptional manner with the affairs of mankind, and that he has given them an infallible revelation in book form of his will and purpose concerning them. This idea was born of ignorance, and has been kept in being by ignorance and imposture. So long as men honestly believe that they have a creed sanctioned by the authority of God, and that belief in it is essential to the welfare of man and society in this world, and indispensable to secure his happiness in eternity, so long, of necessity, there must be bigots and persecutors in the world. And in proportion as this idea prevails among the masses of

men, they must be mental and moral slaves, the dupes of imposition, the victims of a miserable superstition. The chain of evidence by which it is claimed that the Bible is in a special and exceptional sense the "Word of God," has only to be critically examined to discover that it is only a rope of sand. The internal evidence is, if possible, still worse. It bears evident marks of a human origin. Like everything else in nature, or in art, it may be made the instrument of good or evil. It is valuable only in proportion to the amount of truth that it contains. The errors contained in it are more pernicious than if found anywhere else, because they are attributed to God, and men are taught to believe that they must be accepted because God spoke them. There is no proof that God ever spoke to any man in an audible voice, that he ever exhibited himself in proper person, nor that he ever interpolated into the system of Nature a single miracle, nor that he ever revealed himself in any other way than through the medium of the human faculties.

The idea of the existence of a semi-omnipotent evil spirit, called the Devil, who is a rival of God in the government of the world, and who is constantly thwarting him in his designs and defeating his purposes, is a monstrous conception of a weak, ignorant and debased mind. God could not create such a being for want of material out of which to construct him. He could not create himself for the same reason. The only devil that men need to guard themselves against is the one each man carries around with him in his own bosom. A strict watch over that will insure us against all harm from any devil that exists in the Universe.

The various theologies in the world are made up of the opinions of men about religion. They are the systematized thoughts of men on that important and interesting subject. Religion is one thing, the thoughts of men about religion are another and sometimes a very different thing. When these theologies are made a substitute for religion, they inflict a double curse upon mankind. First, by displacing religion, and second by establishing a fraud and an imposition. Hence it is that the popular religion of the day in its organized form is a sham. It sets up a false standard of respectability, virtue and morality. It attaches more importance to belief than to practice; to faith than to character and life. The man who is punctilious in performing the outward rites and ceremonies of religion, although an extortioner or a defaulter, or proud, haughty, vain, morose, selfish and exclusive, is thought to be more religious and more in favor with God than the man who disregards the ceremonies and professions, but is nevertheless kind, generous, benevolent and good. This form of religion is for the most part wholly artificial and uncongenial with the nature of man. Not only is this fact admitted by its advocates, when they insist that it can neither be understood nor embraced by man until he experiences a change of nature, but the fact that, notwithstanding the vast and ponderous machinery which is employed in its propagation, its adherents in this country, at least, constitute a minority of the people, proves that it is artificial rather than natural. When we consider the hundreds of thousands of clergymen and missionaries who are engaged in its propagation, the vast sums of money employed for the same purpose, the millions of Bibles that have been circulated all over

the world, the trillions of tracts, papers, sermons, periodicals and books that have been published in its interest, the wonder is, not that the converts are so many, but that they are so few. And the fact that they are so few cannot be accounted for only by the truth that, as a whole, the system is at war with the nature of man. That it is unsatisfactory to its adherents, is evinced by the fact that so many of them tell us that if they believed there was no endless punishment, they would "take their fill of sin in this world" without regard to God or the interests of humanity. And yet they profess to be *par excellence*, the lovers of God and man. With all such persons religion is a cross, a burden, a mere make-shift to get into heaven, a choice between two evils. It is a terrible thing to be religious, but it is better to be so than it is to go to hell. How much more manly, and noble and truthful is the sentiment of the true religionist. If there were no God, no heaven, no hell, no future state of existence, he would love and practice virtue for its own sake, and for the joy and peace it imparts to the soul. What a mistake it is to suppose that it is necessary to make ourselves miserable on earth in order to be happy in heaven.

The Priesthood is a human institution. It was founded on the idea that God is angry with his creatures, and that his wrath can be propitiated and his favor secured by offerings of presents, by sacrifices of fruits and animals, and by the performance of pompous and imposing rites and ceremonies. Hence the supposed necessity of setting apart a class of men to do this work. The institution is based on a falsehood. The removal of the error will cause the superstition to topple to the ground. Originally the priest-

ly and kingly offices were united in the same man. Priestcraft and kingcraft have been mutual helps to each other. Together they have inflicted untold woes upon the children of men, by depriving them of their inalienable rights, and by imposing upon them burdens "which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear."

Undoubtedly the Priesthood, like all the other learned professions, is composed of both good and bad men. But on the score of merit, it cannot justly claim any superiority over the others. Doubtless the Clergy are no better, nor any worse than the average of men, only so far as the false position which they occupy makes them so. With them the business of theological and religious teaching is a profession and a means of obtaining a livelihood. Before they enter upon their work, they must, before God and man, make solemn professions of faith in a certain creed to which they are expected to adhere and defend during life. On their doing this, their living depends. They have a pecuniary interest at stake. The creed must be maintained, missionary work must be done, contributions must be raised, revival excitements must be gotten up, converts must be made, for all this brings grist to their mill. They are conservative in their tendencies, opposed to all innovation, tenacious and bigoted in their opinions and blind to all newly-discovered truth. They can seldom see the word truth, because, with them, it is covered by a dollar. Their occupation leads them into the practice of conscious or unconscious hypocrisy. They assume a character before the people that they by no means maintain in their families, or when in company with each other. However grave, sanctimonious and cir-

cumspect they may appear in public, when assembled in company by themselves, they are the most jolly of men. They can then crack their jokes, tell funny stories, relate smutty anecdotes and indulge in low gossip to an extent unequaled by any except professional libertines. They denounce human selfishness, and are of all men the most selfish; declaim against avarice, and are mercenary and avaricious; preach against pride, fashion and love of the wor.d, and yet are as proud, as servile imitators of fashion, and manifest as much of the love of the world as other men. They insist on the necessity of self-denial, but think themselves entitled to the most comfortable places, the best bits, the choicest dainties, the lion's share of all the good things of life. They profess to be awfully concerned and anxious for the welfare of poor sinners, but their sleek, smooth, well-to-do appearance gives no indication of excessive anxiety. They claim that men in their natural state are totally depraved, and yet, in this country, at least, they profess to believe in a free government, founded on the principle that the people have a right to govern themselves, an inconsistency so glaring that it makes us suspicious of their sincerity.

The art of proselyting they understand to perfection. This is an important part of their business. However ignorant they may be on all other subjects, this they perfectly well understand. They are in possession of all the accumulated experience of a long line of predecessors extending through all of the past ages. They know human nature well and how to take advantage of its weaknesses. They make their appeals to the superstitious, selfish hopes and fears of ignorant men, and having what Archimedes

only wanted, another world on which to plant their machinery. It is no wonder that in almost all past time they have moved this at their pleasure. They tax all their ingenuity and eloquence in describing the beauties of a heaven about which they know nothing, and a hell of which they are equally ignorant, and the one they promise as a reward to all who embrace their doctrines, the other they threaten as a punishment to be inflicted on all who do not. In this way they may succeed, perhaps, in luring some and entrancing others, but no man was ever made really any better by being actuated by such selfish considerations. They condemn human selfishness and yet cultivate and strengthen it by making constant appeals to it. They are the greatest beggars in the world. Their horseleech cry of give, give, can be heard on the mountains and in the valleys, in the public streets and in the churches. At every public meeting ostensibly for the worship of God, the contribution box is passed around and the people are entreated in God's name to give. The people are assured that if they will give, God will restore to them four-fold, but not one of them will stand sponsor for the fulfillment of the promise or guarantee the refunding of the gift in case it is not. In a thousand variety of ways vast sums of money are raised by these men which goes to help the warring sects to vie with each other in building costly churches and to support a class of useless drones in the human hive.

The same envyings and jealousies that exist among the members of other learned professions exist among them. They will unscrupulously resort to measures to supplant a brother in an advantageous situation, or in the esteem and affections of the people which

lawyers and physicians scorn to adopt, and have too great a sense of horror and manhood to think of adopting. If one of their number happens to become convinced of the erroneousness of his creed and has independence and moral courage enough to avow his honest opinions, the rest will pounce on him like a hawk upon a chicken. They will pursue him with misrepresentations and slander, hurl at him the epithets of "infidelity," emissary of Satan," "enemy of religion," call him a Judas, a renegade, an apostate, ostracize him from society if they can, and all to connteract his influence in opposition to their sectarian views. On the other hand if one of their profession is accused of any crime, the rest of the fraternity will gather around him, form a solid phalanx, and shield him from exposure if they can. The peculiar position occupied by these men brings them into close relation to the female sex. They knowing that women are more susceptible of religious as well as superstitious influence than men, regard them as their right-hand weapon of offensive and defensive war. They rely mainly on them to further their designs. Women educated to believe that they must depend on men for support and protection, will inevitably be inclined to look up to the clergy for religious guidance and instruction. This brings them into frequent and familiar intimacy with that class of men. What has been the result? Not only are our sectarian churches made up principally of women and children, but the history of the priesthood in all ages and countries proves that by no other class of professional men have so many crimes against female virtue been committed as by them.

The clergy profess to look upon what they call Infi-

delity and Materialism with the utmost horror and detestation. They represent that the Materialistic doctrines are destructive of all joy and peace on earth, and deprive us of all our bright hopes and anticipations in regard to the future. Apparently they are entirely unconscious of the fact that they themselves are constantly promulgating a doctrine as much more horrible than anything in Materialism as it is in the power of the human imagination to conceive. At the very worst, even, ultra-Materialism would do nothing worse than consign us to the quiet sleep of non-existence or annihilation, whereas the doctrine of the clergy would involve a majority of our race in miseries untold, never-ending and indescribable. All, therefore, who hope for a future blissful existence, must desire it with the full knowledge that if they have it, they enjoy it at the expense of the endless and inconceivable sufferings of millions of their fellow men. Can a more monstrous exhibition of supreme selfishness be conceived?

These men claim, too, that by some mysterious supernatural process they have experienced such a change of nature, such a regeneration of character, such a sanctification of mind and heart as fits them to be the month-pieces of God, and the leaders and instructors of mankind. But of what use is it for them to pretend to any superior sanctity, when all intelligent men know, and all the world ought to know, that they "are men of like passions as others," that they have the same appetites, passions, desires, faults and foibles that all men have. The criminal records of the country prove, that in proportion to their numbers no class of educated men furnish a greater number of the inmates of our jails and prisons than the clergy.

Now there are in the United States nearly fifty thousand clergymen. We would utilize this element of society. That portion of them who, by their education, talents and moral worth are qualified for the work, we would have converted into teachers in our schools and seminaries of learning, public lecturers and leaders of the people in the great work of reform. We would have them teach their fellow men on those subjects about which they have some positive knowledge, and in relation to which it is of the utmost importance that they be informed. We would have them teach the people to know themselves, to do their own thinking, to form their own opinions, to understand the laws of their own nature, and the conditions on which the prosperity and happiness of human beings depend. We would place them on a level with the rest of mankind, give them the same chances, the same opportunities, and let them depend on themselves, instead of being merely dependents upon others. As for the rest, we would have them expend the force and energy which they now spend for naught in some branches of trade, or agriculture, and thereby make themselves a blessing to the world.

To this, or something like this, it must come at last. The people will not always suffer themselves to be led hoodwinked to their own destruction. A revolt is sure to come, and when it does come it is to be hoped that the crimes of the priesthood against humanity will not be too vividly remembered against them, and that the sins of their predecessors who lived in the dead past will not be visited on those who exist in the living present.

Religion is natural to man. It is not an exotic which must be grafted upon him, but is indigenous in the soil

of his heart and mind. God has endowed him with religious faculties which seek gratification. It is only necessary to develop and properly direct the religious powers to make him all that religion requires. Man's religious faculties, like all his other faculties, are liable to be misdirected. He possesses no appetite, no passion, no faculty that is not in itself good. All that is wrong in man consists in the perversion or abuse of powers which are in themselves good. When his religious faculties are properly directed, they tend to good, and only good, both to himself and his fellow men. When misdirected they are liable to produce an incalculable amount of mischief. It is a law of nature that the very best things are capable of being converted into the very worst. Thus it is that religion when perverted may become a curse to its possessor and render him a curse to the world. Woe to the world when a religious fanatic or monomaniac is let loose in it! Conceiving that he only has God's truth, and that the salvation of the world depends upon the universal acceptance of it by men, and that all who do not accept it are the enemies of God and religion, he goes forth full of bigotry and intolerance, scattering firebrands, arrows and death in the world, and denounces the thunderbolts of God's wrath upon all he deems to be God's foes. Animated by a zeal without knowledge, he has no mercy on others, nor even on himself. He will endure privations, encounter the greatest difficulties, brave the most imminent dangers, bid defiance to tortures, eagerly shed his blood or lay down his life to seal his testimony. He may be compared to a lion uncaged, a tiger unchained, a hyena let loose.

To be truly religious is to be God-like in character

and disposition. To be merciful and mild, peaceable and kind, charitable toward all, forbearing and forgiving even toward enemies. Religion is true manhood. To be religious is to be a well developed man, a true gentleman, a lover of all men, both good and bad. The distinction between good and bad men is only a difference of degree. None are completely good, none are entirely bad. Human nature is the same in all men, but is manifested in a variety of ways. The human race furnishes one of the best illustrations of the law of unity in variety. The difference in the character and disposition of men is a difference of organization, temperament, education, climate and condition. Men may be found, even in civilzed society, in all the intermediate stages of development between the lowest barbarism and the highest civilization. In proportion as a man is wicked he is barbarous, in proportion as he is good he is civilized. Notwithstanding the diversity of character and action among men, all are prompted to action by one grand leading motive, the desire of happiness and the dread of misery. Men seek happiness in a variety of ways, and commit many blunders and mistakes in their efforts to obtain it. The good find it, the bad miss it. The Christian deludes himself if he supposes that he is actuated by motives any different from those of other men. If he renounces what he supposes to be the pleasures of this world for the sake of the glory and bliss of eternity, he has made a good bargain, he has looked out for number one. The balance of profit and loss is decidedly in his favor. No shrewd Yankee could hope to make a better bargain. If the wicked expect to find happiness in sin, they commit a capital mistake, which, sooner or later, it is to be hoped they

will discover and correct. The good are to be congratulated on account of their goodness, the bad are to be commiserated on account of their badness. We are, therefore, to have "compassion on the ignorant and those who are out of the way." We are to be as God is, "kind even to the unthankful and the evil."

Is this religion a grevious burden on men? No, it is no burden at all. Is its yoke heavy? No yoke about it. Is it hard to practice? Far from it. Will it make our pleasures less on earth? It will greatly enhance and increase them. Will the practice of it subject us to the scorn and derision of ungodly men? "Who is he that will harm you if you be a follower of that which is good?" No; even the vilest of men are so constituted by nature that they cannot but respect virtue, honesty, goodness, and those who practice these virtues, whether they themselves practice them or not.

The truly religious man, freed from every vestige of superstition, full of confidence in God and human nature, views this life as a school, a state of discipline for the development of the powers and faculties of man. He believes that for this purpose man has been subjected to many and grevious evils, but that nevertheless, there is much more happiness than misery in the world, more virtue than vice, more good than evil. Evil in his view is but the shadow of good. "There will be briers where berries grow." If we have the good we must take the evil also. Error he conceives to have no existence except in the opinions of men. Outside the human mind there are no errors, no mistakes. Error has no basis in nature, no solid foundation to rest on. It, like evil, may be outgrown. The error of to-day may be supplanted, extinguished, annihilated by the truth of to-morrow. It is, therefore,

transient, evanescent, passing away. So with evil. There is no absolute evil in the Universe. Every stage of human existence has its apparent evils. The ignorance, dependence and helplessness of infancy and youth are outgrown when we come to be men. The evils connected with manhood we are relieved from in old age, and the evils incident to old age are terminated by death. We may hope that the evils of our present state of existence will not follow us into another and higher mode of existence. Whether evils of any kind will exist in that life is more than we can tell. But if they do, we may be sure that the Being who has so guarded the interests of his creatures here, that none of us can suffer only a certain amount of pain without its terminating in death, will so protect his creatures there, as to render their existence a blessing and not a curse. God's ways are perfect. "He hath done all things well." He has so established the order of the moral world as that no virtue can be unrewarded, no vice unpunished. The man who inflicts an injury on his fellow man, at the same time inflicts a much greater one on himself. It is better to be slandered than to slander, to be stolen from than to steal, to be murdered than to murder, "to suffer wrong than to do wrong" Nature knows nothing about forgiveness in the sense of the remission of retribution, nothing about inflicting punishment upon the innocent for the sins of the guilty; nothing about atoning for sin by shedding the blood of innocent victims. On the contrary the great law of Nature is, "he that doeth wrong shall suffer for the wrong which he hath done", and there is no respect of persons."

It is not for us to say who are the proper objects of God's righteous retribution, nor who should be the re-

cipients of his blessings. We know but little about ourselves, and still less about our fellow men. We cannot determine the amount of guilt or innocence of a single human being. It ill becomes us to presume to sit in judgment on our fellows. God only can be the proper judge, and "the judge of all the earth will do right." It is for us to look with charity upon all men, to encourage them who are in the right way, and to pity those who do wrong .

The true religionist rises to the conception that the human race constitutes a brotherhood, that we all have one Father, all belong to one Church—the Church of Humanity ; that we are all teachers, and at the same time learners in that Church, that the Bible of Nature includes all books, all objects, all sounds, all thoughts and all sensations. That the rites and ceremones of this Church consist in doing good to all men as we have opportunity. The whole duty of man consists in doing all the good he can, and as little harm as possible.

In regard to futurity, the philosophic religionist realizes that all that relates to the future, beyond the present moment, must be included in the domain of the *unknown.* Aside from the accounts both ancient and modern of the re-appearance of persons in the spirit who were known to have lived and died on earth—accounts which are believed by some and discredited by others—the veil which separates the future life from the present has never been lifted, much less removed. The question "if a man die shall he live again" has been as thoroughly investigated and discussed as any other. Able, learned, and good men have advocated both sides of the question. Whenever a people emerge from a condition of ignorance and semi-barbarism

doubters and unbelievers appear among them, the number increases in the ratio that intelligence is diffused, and civilization, culture and refinement are promoted. Belief is the most general among those who think and know the least on the subject. Doubt is allmost exclusively confined to thinking, intelligent, well-informed men. We draw no inference from this, but simply state the fact.

If we analyze and criticise the argument usually relied on to prove a future life, it is plain that they are inconclusive and unsatisfactory except to those who are resolutely determined to cling to a belief in it without regard to argument or evidence. To the calm enquirer whose mind is regulated by evidence in believing, and who has no desire to believe anything but what is true, however pleasing and agreeable the belief may be, they will be seen to be mere inferences, often from premises which are wholly absurd, or deductions from premises which do not warrant the conclusion.

No argument in its favor is more frequently appealed to, nor more generally relied on, than that founded on the desire of men for immortality, and the happifying influence of a belief in it. It is surprising that well-informed men can delude themselves with an argument like this. Who does not know that the hopes as well as the fears of mankind can be as readily excited by fiction as by fact. And who does not know that the idle fancies of our childhood days are dispelled by age and experience? In like manner stern truths of logic and philosophy dissipate the ideal fancies of our maturer years.

On the other hand it is impossible to prove that there is no future life. The utmost that un-

believers can do is to nullify the arguments of the believer by demonstrating their entire fallacy. The question then relates to the unknown, if not to the unknowable. It opens a wide field for the imagination to roam in. All our thoughts on the subject are purely ideal and subjective. That they are not reliable is proved by the fact that the conceptions of different persons are in direct contradiction. To persons who abound in hope, the picture of the future will appear painted in the most gorgeous colors; to those in whom fear predominates it will present only the blackness of darkness forever.

The influence of the belief in the doctrine in question will depend on the character and disposition of the believer, and the form in which it is held. In calculating its influence upon character, it is necessary to keep in view the following facts. 1. No speculative opinion has the power to change the nature of man. 2. The natural character and dispostion of men being dependent on organization and temperament can be effected but very little by their opinions. The utmost that opinion can do, is to call into exercise feelings and sentiments which already exist (in a latent condition perhaps) in the individual, and give direction to his actions. 3. So much stronger is the natural character than opinion, that men often act in a manner entirely inconsistent with their belief. Men are not in character and disposition what they are, because they believe as they do. Hence we have good and bad men of all forms of belief, of all sects and of no sect. A good man will be good in spite of his belief, however bad; a bad man will be bad in spite of his belief, however good. Belief is not a sure index of character, but conduct is. "By their fruits ye

shall know them" is the best test that can be applied.

The doctrine of a future life is held in a great variety of forms. In some of its phases it is comparatively harmless. But in the form in which it has been, and is now most popular in the world, if it is capable of doing some good, it is also capable of doing, and has done an immense amount of mischief. No doctrine, whatever, appeals with more power to the hopes and fears of mankind, or is better calculated to stir their emotions, and call into exercise all the feelings of their nature. When we consider how general has been the belief in it, and how much it has been enforced and enlarged upon, it is truly wonderful, that its influence has not been much greater than it has. It can only be accounted for on the supposition that its most intelligent believers have not more than half belived it, and that the ignorant multitude have accepted and endorsed it, without at all comprehending its full import and meaning. In the opinion of the writer its influence for good has been very genealy overestimated, while its power to do harm has not been realized by the many, and has been perhaps exaggerated by the few.

In contemplating the subject, we have often wondered why men do not more generally view it in the light of reason and common sense.

A conscious existence after death is something about which all knowledge is withheld from us. If knowledge on the subject would be a blessing, it would not be withheld. We may, therefore, conclude that it is best for us to be ignorant in relation to it. We have been pushed into being by a power over which we have no control. This power, if it knows anything, knows a great deal better than we do whether it is best for us

to live another life or not. If it is best, we shall certainly live again. If it is not best it is folly for us to desire it. The best course for us to pursue, then, is to moderate our desires, and to banish all anxious thoughts upon the subject. Anxious thought, even, in relation to the to-morrow of our present life was condemned by the teacher, Christ; why should we be more anxious about another life? It was a noble saying of the great Spinoza, "the free man thinks not of death, but only of life." The great question for each one of us is not, shall I live and be happy to-morrow or next year, or in another state of existence, but do I live and am I happy to-day?

Those who embrace the popular view may boast, as they are wont to do, about the superiority of their faith; but who has the most confidence in the Supreme Power, he who is willing to trust his destiny, both for time and eternity, to Nature's disposal, or he who is constantly troubled and anxious in regard to what final disposition is to be made of him? We know our present existence terminates in death, but we do not know, nor have we good reason to believe, that death is an evil, unless it be an evil not to exist. But if it is an evil not to exist, what a monstrous and inconceivable evil has been endured by every individual of the human race, in that, during the incalculable lapse of time before our existence here, we had no existence. At most, death can only put us back into the same condition we were before our existence here. Not to be, can be no evil, but life, if it is a miserable life, is an evil for which there is no remedy but death. Neither life, nor death is an entity. Both are phenomenal. Death is the absence of life, or the negation of life. Nothing is more natural than death. Life and

death are intimately connected. They run parallel with each other. We no sooner begin to live than we commence to die. Death pervades every kingdom in nature. Man, beasts, birds, fishes, insects, vegetables, all alike are subject to the dominion of death. Can it be that a thing so natural, so common, so universal can be an evil? For aught we know, life cannot exist in finite beings only in connection with death. Death is not a force. If life is a force, it is far more rational to find fault with life rather than death, inasmuch as life deserts us at last and consigns us to the condition of death. Nothing serves better to illustrate the pernicious influence of false education than the fact that that which men most dread and fear of all things on earth has the least power to do them harm.

It may be objected that this view leaves us in uncertainty in regard to the future. But is there not the same uncertainty in relation to everything that is future to the present moment? We know that we live to-day, we do not know that we shall to-morrow nor next year. When we close our eyes in sleep we are not certain that we shall ever be aroused from our slumber. However certain the believer may be that he shall live again after death, he is not certain in regard to what his doom may be in that life, or if he is, his mind must be in painful uncertainty in regard to the doom of others.

Again it may be said, that, however plausible our view may be, it is at least *safer* to adopt the popular belief. If we proceed on the principle here indicated, our only safety lies in taking refuge in the bosom of the Catholic Church. The truth is, our true safety consists in being honest with ourselves, and true to our own convictions. He who pursues any other course is

either a slave, or a hypocrite and knave. Honesty is the mark of nobleness and manhood, and will carry a man triumphantly through life, through death, and through any life that may await him in the future. The motto of every rational man should be this: "The best possible security for the future is a wise improvement of the present." Once more: It may be objected that according to our common-sense view of the doctrine of a future life, for anything we know to the contrary, death may terminate the existence of man forever, and this is rather a gloomy view of human destiny.

There are four prominent views of the destiny of man, which it may be well to state and view in contrast. The first supposes that at death, man is resolved into his original elements, and is, so far as personal consciousness and identity are concerned, as though he had never been. One common destiny awaits the human race. In the grave all ranks are leveled, the king lies as low as the beggar, and all distinctions are done away, If we are insensible to happiness, we are also beyond the reach of sorrow, suffering and pain. If we suffer a loss by death, it is a loss of which we shall be forever entirely unconscious. That this view is not as cheering as we are capable of conceiving we have no disposition to deny.

The next view is, that there is to be a future life to be enjoyed by a portion of the human race, while by far the largest portion are to be annihilated forever.

The third view admits a future life for all, but contends that while it will be a life of blessedness to a comparative few, to untold millions it will be a life of inconceivable wretchedness and woe.

The last view supposes that the future life will ul-

timately result in the endless enjoyment and happiness of all mankind.

The first view may be somewhat gloomy, but it is sustained by all human observation and experience. The second may be a little less gloomy, but that is all that can be claimed in its favor. On the ground of reason, we can see no good cause for thinking that there is a sufficient difference between the best man that ever lived and the worst one, to make an infinite difference in their destiny. The third has a bright side, but it has also a dark side. And the dark side is so inexpressibly horrible and revolting as to obscure even its bright side. It does not become its advocates to object to the first view, on account of its gloominess, so long as their view is so much more liable to the same objection. If the fourth view could be sustained by a sufficient amount of evidence, no possible objection could lie against it, All it lacks is the proof. Reason sees that the order of nature is, that whatever has a beginning must have an end. Immortality can be predicated only of that which has had no beginning in time. And as man, as a conscious, thinking, being had a beginning in time, so in time he must have an end. It cannot be denied, however, that the same power that conferred existence upon us, may do so again ; but whether it will or not, is more than we mortals at present know.

Reader, if you are morbidly sensitive on the question of immortality, you may not like the views above presented. Very well, my friend, you are at liberty to seek for better, and to find them if you can, but I beg of you not to deem me your enemy because I tell you what I believe to be the truth.

[THE END.]

A Sketch of the Life of E. E. Guild.

When the foregoing pages were nearly ready for the press I wrote to Mr. G. requesting a short notice of his past career, believing that the same would be acceptable to the readers of this little volume. In his reply he declined the suggestion, saying he did not think his life had been eventful enough, or that it had possessed importance enough to justify anything being said about it.

I still felt that a brief sketch of the writer of the foregoing pages would be acceptable to those who read them. I wrote to Dr. T. L. Brown of Binghamton, whom I knew to be well acquainted with Mr. Guild, requesting him to send, unknown to his friend, a short account of his journey in life. He kindly sent the following, and every reader will undoubtedly thank the Doctor for the interesting sketch of the man who has led so blameless a life—who penned the forgoing sensible pages and who was too modest to write a word about himself.

THE PUBLISHER.

MR. D. M. BENNETT, *Dear Friend:* Everet Emmett Guild, was born in Delhi, Delaware County, New York, May 6th, 1811. His parents were from New

England, his father was a native of Connecticut, his mother of Massachusetts. When he was three years of age the family moved to Walton, sixteen miles from Delhi, on the west branch of the Deleware river, where the sujbect of this notice was reared until he became of age. His father was an Episcopalian, liberal and tolerant in his views and feelings; his mother was a Congregationalist, strongly religious, very sincere, and took unwearied pains to indoctrinate the minds of her children into the creed of her church. She, however, possessed a great share of good sense, and attached more importance to a correct life, than to a correct belief. She was a conscientious believer in supernatural religion and the divinity of the Bible. These facts are mentioned in order to show under what religious influence Mr. Guild was brought up.

Aside from his own efforts to educate himself, he has had no advantages of education except those afforded by the common school, and a course of study of theology under the direction of Rev. Stephen R. Smith, a prominent Universalist clergyman, then of Clinton, Oneida County, N. Y.

In 1835 he commenced officiating as a clergyman, preaching mainly in the counties of Deleware, Chenango and Otsego in New York, and Susquehanna, Luzerne and Wayne in Pennsylvania. He commenced his public career with views more nearly resembling those of the Hicksite Quakers than any other and always called himself a Quaker Universalist.

He attached but little importance to forms and ceremonies, but insisted most strenuously on the practice of morality and virtue. It was often remarked by some who heard him preach: "he will never succeed he preaches too much truth" or, "he insists too much

on honesty." During his ministry he engaged quite extensively in theological debate, holding some ten or twelve public discussions with prominent clergymen of the Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Christian and Second Adventist denominations. All these debates, however excepting one, were engaged in by him in answer to invitations given by his antagonists. Mr Guild always identified himself with the progressive school of theologians and did not hesitate to give the advocates of new views an open field and fair play. Possessed of an inquiring, investigating turn of mind and devoting much time to study and reflection, he kept constantly making advances, until at last he was completely emancipated from all traditional beliefs, and conscientiously adopted the opinions which are set forth in this book. These views, as he informs us, are the result of more than forty years of patient, persevering, and untiring investigation. Mr. Guild is emphatically a "self-made man." He affords a fair example of what an individual may accomplish for himself by well directed effort. He appeared upon the stage of public action, with less than a hundred dollars in his possession, and, unaided by the patronage of rich or influential friends, and although holding opinions at variance with those of the majority in the communities in which he has resided, he has succeeded in procuring for himself and family a decent support, and in gaining the respect and good will even of those who were the most bitterly opposed to his opinions.

In his youth he was distinguished for his love of athletic sports and exercises. In running, leaping, wrestling, lifting, ball-playing, etc., he was seldom excelled by his youthful companions. He was also fond of hunting, fishing, and trapping, and was greatly

successful in these pursuits. In the meantime he was an active member of a debating club in the village where he resided, which met once a week during the Winter season, and it was in this school that he acquired the habit of investigating, and learned the art of debating, and of public speaking. Mr. Guild is naturally inclined to be thoughtful and serious, but is also fond of innocent mirth, and relishes jokes, anecdotes and amusing stories right well. He is an intuitive logician. It is as natural to him to arrange his ideas in a logical method, as it is to breathe. His antagonists in public debate, very soon learned never to concede to him his premises, for if they did they were sure of being "driven to the wall." Mr. Guild has a passionate thirst for knowledge, and has devoted a great deal of time to the acquisition of useful information.

There is scarcely any subject that ever engaged human attention and interest that he has not investigated to a greater or less extent. He is uniformly good natured and treats everybody with proper deference and respect. He never obtrudes his opinions on others; but when questioned, never hesitates to openly and frankly avow them. He has the most perfect command of himself, and although possessed of a sanguine, nervous, excitable temperament, it seems almost impossible to throw him from his balance even under the most trying circumstances.

Some of his antagonists in public debate tried their best to irritate and "provoke him to wrath;" but never succeeded in a single instance. On one occasion when his opponent was aggravatingly insulting and abusive, and full of wrath, shook his fist in his face expressing wonder that God should suffer such a

wretch to live, Mr. G. arose and very coolly remarked, that he had often said that he would be willing to trust his eternal destiny to the decision of the worst man that ever lived; but now, said he, I take that back, I have found one man that I dare not trust to that extent.

On the same occasion the debate was attended throughout by the wife of a Presbyterian Deacon. At the close she remarked that Mr. S. might be the most orthodox in his belief, "but surely," said she, "Mr. G. is by far the most amiable man, and manifests most of the Christian spirit."

None of his opponents ever complained of his treating them in any other than in a fair, respectful and gentlemanly manner. Among the various anecdotes related of him, here is one that is quite amusing as illustrative of his tact in warding off designed insults: He was attending a quarterly conference of the Chenango Association of Universalists, which was held in a Baptist church, very much in opposition to the wishes of some of its proprietors. He was appointed to preach in the forenoon of the second day. On going to the Church in the morning, a slip of paper was found pinned to the door, on which was written this passage of scripture: "O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the Devil," etc. It was handed around among the preachers, and the inquiry arose what should be done with it. Mr. G. very quietly told them to hand it to him and let him dispose of it as he saw fit.

After the preliminary services in the pulpit, he arose to preach his sermon; but before naming his text, coolly took from his vest pocket the slip of paper, read it, and explained the circumstances under which it

was found. He then remarked that he supposed it was designed to characterize the preachers then present as children of the Devil, and so far as it was intended to apply to him, he begged the privilege of assigning a few reasons for thinking that he was not a child of the Devil, as follows:

First, It is a law of Nature that children should bear some resemblance to their parents in their physical conformation. The Devil, it is said, has a cloven foot, but if you examine my feet, you will find no such deformity.

Second, It is also nature's law that children should resemble their parents in their natural character and disposition. The Devil is said to be constantly seeking whom he may devour, but I was never known to devour a single human being, nor to manifest the least disposition to do so.

Third, My mother is a member of the Congregational Church, and if you go to her and tell her that I am a child of the Devil, she will indignantly repel the charge and show you the way to the door.

Mr. G. was never a sectarian nor a proselyter in the ordinary acceptation of these terms. He simply proclaimed what he believed to be the truth, and left it optional with his hearers in regard to signing creeds and connecting themselves with ecclesiastical organizations. He is a reformer, and has been identified with all the principal reforms of his day, such as the dress reform, the dietetic reform, prison reform, reform of the criminal code, etc. He advocated the gradual emancipation of the Southern slaves, and engaged zealously in the advocacy of the policy of making the public lands free to actual settlers. He assisted in starting a paper in Honesdale, Pa., devot-

ed to this cause, and was one of its principal contributors.

Being an intimate acquaintance and friend of Galusha A. Grow, a Congressman from Pennsylvania, and once Speaker of the House of Representatives, he was instrumental in bringing that subject to his notice, the result of which was that Mr. Grow introduced the Homestead Bill into Congress, and championed it until it became a law. He is also an ardent advocate of the temperance cause.

He has been a somewhat voluminous writer. Contributions from from his pen have appeared in a number of different papers. In 1844 he published a denominational book, entitled, "The Universalist's Book of Reference." It has passed through five editions, and is believed to have had a larger sale than any other book of the kind, except one, ("The Life of Rev. John Murray,") which has been much longer in market.

As a public speaker, Mr. Guild is slow, cool, deliberate, argumentative, methodical, logical, impressive, and as forcible as his physical strength will admit of. He makes no attempt at oratory, and uses only such words as are in common use. He has a peculiar faculty of expressing himself clearly and intelligibly, and of making himself most thoroughly understood. He always has an object in view, and shoots straight at the mark. Having a vivid perception of the connection and relation of one truth to another, and of the unity of truth, his discourses are often too thorough, elaborate and exhaustive to suit the taste of the unthinking multitude, and can be appreciated only by intelligent, thinking men. He views all subjects from the standpoint of reason and common sense,

and seems to scorn to make use of the tricks and arts so often employed by public speakers for mere sensation and effect. He appears to rely wholly on argument and persuasion to accomplish his purpose. O. S. Fowler once remarked of him, when examining his head, "This man has a reason for everything he believes and for everything he does; his head is full of ideas, and arguments with him are as plenty as blackberries in August."

As a clergyman, no charge was ever brought against him, except that of heresy.

As a man and a citizen, he is without reproach. He now resides in Binghamton, N. Y., has retired comparatively from the active duties of life, and claims to have enjoyed as much of life as usually falls to the lot of mortals. In theology, he is a Pantheist; in philosophy, a Materialist; in medicine, an Eclectic; in Religion, a Rationalist, and in morals a Utilitarian. Truly yours, T. L. BROWN.

Binghamton, N. Y., Oct. 18th, 1875.

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Did Jesus Really Exist?

BY D. M. BENNETT.

The extreme doubt whether such a person as Jesus Christ had a real existence is strengthened more and more the fuller the matter is investigated. The fact that he never wrote a line that has been handed down to posterity, that the world has no possible means of knowing any thing about such a personage having lived save what is obtained from the unknown authors of what are called the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; and when there is no evidence that these books were written before the second century, it can be readily understood that the life and character of the individual under consideration is extremely mythical, as there is no cotemporaneous hishistory showing that such a person lived.

Our opponents frequently quote a paragraph found in Josephus, corroborating the claim that such a person did live at one time in Judea. But Dr. Lardner, one of the most eminent Christian historians, long ago pronounced this an interpolation, a forgery, and that it never existed in the original manuscript of Jo-

sephus. This opinion of Dr. Lardner was also entertained by Gibbon, Ittigius, Blondell, Le Clerc, Vandale, Bishop Warburton, and Tanaquil Faber, the most of whom are noted Christian authorities. In fact the first Christian writers and authors of the past, as well as of the present day, unite in agreeing that the paragraph alluded to is a forgery. Eusebius, in the fourth century, was the first to call attention to the spurious passage, and he is generally accredited with having inserted the paragraph referrring to Jesus. On several occasions Eusebius proved himself amply able to use interpolation, spurious additions and forgeries. Mosheim, in his Ecclesiastical History, page 70, in alluding to this characteristic of the early Christian Fathers, uses this language, that "it was not only lawful, but commendable to deceive and lie for the sake of truth and piety." It is lamentable that so little reliance can be placed upon the authenticity of the Christian writers in the early centuries of our era. The fact that they were crafty and designing men, and that they used their best abilities to build up the new system of religion which they had allied themselves to, requires no additional proof.

It is a well-known fact that, in the first and second centuries, there were three distinct classes of Christians; one the Gnostics, who firmly held that such a person or individual as Christ had not had an existence as a man in the flesh, and that he was a spirit only. The Arians were another class, who admitted that there was a man Jesus, but that he was merely a human being, and not a God. The third class maintained that he not only existed in the flesh, but that he was also the eternal God of heaven and earth. The

disputes and quarrels between these contending factions became very heated and bitter, until finally the third class, by strategy and superior numbers, overpowered those who denied that such a person as Christ had had a real existence, and forced them to abandon the field, and it afterwards became a recognized dogma of the Church that Jesus had not only been a man, but, also, was absolutely God. But that large numbers in the first two centuries did persistently and stoutly contend that such a person as Christ had not had a real existence in the body, cannot be effectually gainsaid, and is well calculated to excite our liveliest suspicions.

In taking into consideration the characteristics of men who have played an active part in different ages of the world in establishing the various systems of religion and creeds the world has known, it is not difficult to appreciate how such a system as Christianity might have gained a foothold among men without the events strictly having transpired which are claimed. In our own day, we have seen Mormonism arise from the merest pretenses and the barest assertions, and have seen it within a few decades grow into a system that now has very considerable strength and has the implicit confidence of thousands.

Mahometanism is another illustration of this religious growth. It originated in the claims, assertions and assumptions of an individual, and gradually spread over several countries until hundreds of millions accepted it as a God-given religion, and they have not a shade of doubt but what it is the most divine bequest ever made to the world. Those of us who are not under the influence of this religion, can easily see where its devotees are mistaken, and that they have been mis-

led by designing or deluded leaders. If it is impossible for us to feel the same veneration for their creed and their superstitions that they do, we can complacently and dispassionately view the position they occupy, with the disinterestedness of an outside observer, and can easily perceive the mistakes and fallacies they have made, as well as comprehend the untenability of the divine claims they set up.

So it is with Christianity. To those not encircled within the influence which it exerts, and who do not bow to the demands which it sets up, are able to see not only its defects, but the errors it makes in claiming a direct divine origin.

When we find that the authorities upon which a system rests are defective, and that they do not corroborate the claims put forth by its advocates, we have good grounds to doubt its truth. We remarked that the four gospels were unknown till near the close of the second century, or rather that there is no proof of their having an earlier existence. Irenæus was the first Christian writer who referred to them or recognized them as being extant, and he died in the forepart of the third century. Other pretended and spurious gospels, almost without number, had been known prior to this, but they were discarded as fraudulent, and those upon which the grand fabric of Christianity is founded, were unknown till near two hundred years after the time Jesus was said to have lived. What an uncertain data to build upon. What a fine opportunity was here afforded the early fathers to get up the gospel story, or to have it written to order. The gospels have been attributed to various Christian fathers, as well as to bishops, priests and monks, but with what amount of truth it is now impossible to

demonstrate. It is also claimed that the plot of the gospel story was handed down from the Essenes, the Therapeuts and the monks of Egypt, and was revised, re-written and re-located by Christians in the early centuries, similar to what Shakespeare did by the most of his plays, the plots of which were borrowed from the inventions and traditions of earlier times.

The Nicene Council, consisting of several hundred quarrelsome and pugilistic bishops, called together by that wholesale Christian murderer, Constantine, which assembled in the year 325, in which contentions and fights without number took place, took into consideration the authenticity of fifty or more "gospels," written by different individuals, and after indulging in the most acrimonious dissensions and fist-fights, finally decided by vote whether the different gospels presented were the word of God. They rejected all but the four now in the Testament, and one of those was admitted by a single vote; but it was not until the middle of the sixth century that the books now composing the New Testament were fully settled upon, several of them having been persistently discarded by previous authorities. Thus, we see, by what a frail tenure our boasted "word of God" hangs, and how easy it was for fraud and deception to have been practiced in getting it up.

The facts we have here mentioned, together with others we have before alluded to, the close resemblance between Jesus and the numerous demi-gods and teachers who preceded him, are quite sufficient to shake the confidence of the most credulous devotee in the actuality of his existence. Christna, Buddha and others have been considered, but if it is not too much like repetition, we will call attention to

others who preceded Jesus, and to whom his acts and sayings bear a very strong resemblance,

ALCIDES, of Egypt, was said to have been born of a virgin; to have performed miraculous cures; to have converted water into wine; to have cast out devils; to have raised two persons from the dead; to have restored sight to the blind; to have made the dumb to speak and the lame to walk. For Osiris, also, similar claims were made.

Of PYTHAGORAS, of Greece, his devout followers asserted that he was originally a spirit from heaven; that his birth was miraculously foretold; that his mother, a virgin, conceived by a spectre; that in his youth he astonished the doctors by his learning and knowledge; that he could foretell events; that he could subdue wild beasts; that he could be in two places at once; that he could walk on water; that he could handle poisonous serpents without injury; that he cured all manner of diseases; restored sight to the blind; cast out devils; allayed tempests; raised people from the dead, and thousands, almost, of other wonderful feats as narrated by Jambilicus. He was said to possess a very humble disposition; to be very kind to the poor; to have fasted and prayed, and that he advised his disciples to forsake relatives and houses and lands for religion's sake. In precepts, moral lessons and purity of life, there was a great similarity between him and Jesus, but the latter is not claimed to have existed till the former had been dead five hundred years.

PROMETHEUS was a mythical character, but five centuries before the time of Jesus it was held of him that he had a miraculous birth, that he had a band of disciples; that he taught the best moral precepts; that

he was finally crucified as an expiation for mankind amid signs, wonders, and miracles; that nature was convulsed, and that deceased saints arose from their graves; that the sun was darkened and refused to shine; that after crucifixion he descended into hell, and was afterwards seen to ascend into heaven.

APOLLONIUS of Tyana, in Cappadocia, had faithful disciples and biographers in Dumos and Philostratus, who made great claims for this remarkable personage, and which were implicitly believed by great numbers of people. That he had a miraculous conception; that his mother was a virgin; that all nature was subject to his power; that he performed great numbers of miraculous cures; that he restored the blind to sight; made the lame to walk; cast out devils; raised the dead; read the thoughts of those around him; caused a tree to bloom; spoke in languages he never learned; that he was transfigured; that he led a spotless life; that he did not marry, and opposed sexual pleasures; that he spent his time in teaching those who gathered around him; that he was a prophet, and could foretell events; that he was imprisoned and loaded with chains; that he was crucified midst a display of divine power; that he rose from the dead; that he appeared to his disciples after his resurection; that he finally ascended up to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father, and much more of a similar character, and fully equal in every respect to what was claimed for Jesus.

Of SIMON MAGUS, who also existed before Christ, it was claimed that he was "in the beginning with God" that he existed from all eternity; that he took upon himself the form of man; that he was the "word" the son of God' that he was the second

person in the trinity; that he could control the elements; that he could walk in the air: that he could move any bodies at will; that he raised the dead; that he came to redeem the world from sin; that he was the world's "Savior," "Redeemer," and "the only begotten of the Father," and that through his name the world was to be saved.

Numerous other "Saviors" and "Redeemers," who lived before Christ might be named in this connection to show the striking similarity which existed between him and them, but we have already quoted enough to give the reader clearly to understand that there were, hundreds of years before the time of Jesus, abundance of material of which to spin and weave his story; and that taking all the facts into consideration, the prior existence of similar claims, and the extrême doubt of the authenticity of the gospel narratives of Christ, the strongest probability is that such a personage is Jesus never had an existence; or, that if he did exist, he was only a common mortal, to whom, a century or two after his death was falsely attributed by designing, dishonest persons, deific characteristics, impossible performances, and moral utterances, after the style of the fabulous demi-gods and distinguished teachers of older times.

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AT AYLMER, ONTARIO,

AND CONTINUING FOUR DAYS.

BETWEEN

PROF. O. A. BURGESS,

PRES'T N. W. CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY, INDIANAPOLIS, IND.,

AND

B. F. UNDERWOOD,

OF BOSTON, MASS.

REPORTED BY JOHN T. HAWKE.

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